ATHLON SPORTS

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

2024 EDITION

FULL-PAGE PREVIEWS OF ALL
134 FBS TEAMS

TOP 25

PLAYOFF PREDICTIONS

SEASON OF CHANGE

- → CFP EXPANSION
- → REALIGNMENT
- → NIL/PORTAL STRATEGY
- → PETRINO, PRIME AND A NEW ERA OF COACHING
- → PLUS MORE KEY STORYLINES

LIFE AFTER SABAN

TIDE TURNS TO DEBOER

PLUS

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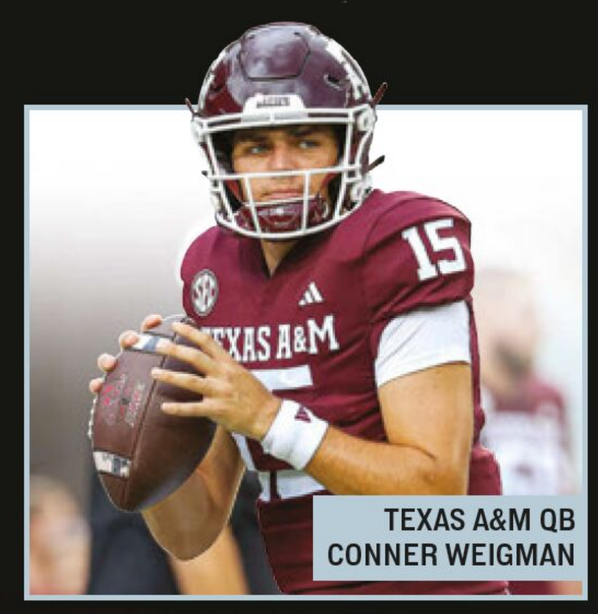
ALL-AMERICA TEAM

ANONYMOUS SCOUTING FROM RIVAL COACHES

OKLAHOMA LB DANNY STUTSMAN



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EDITOR'S LETTER

College football's new (and improved?) era marches on, with Colorado head coach Deion Sanders the perfect living embodiment of the current NIL/portal-dominated product.

One thing I appreciate and enjoy about Coach Prime's approach is his affinity for sharing his raw, unvarnished opinions on social media. Sure, his musings often lack tact and grace, but don't we want to know what coaches are really thinking? With Prime, there's rarely if ever a question in that department.

In the pages that follow, you'll get similarly unedited, unvarnished opinions from coaches (though they might not be as cuttingly worded as some of Prime's posts on the socials).

As he has done for the last several years, college football scribe Steven Godfrey has compiled anonymous comments from assistant coaches across the country who share what they really think about their rivals' prospects for this season. You want to know what coaches are thinking about Kalen DeBoer's chances of filling Nick Saban's shoes? Just flip to page 160 and read what one rival assistant thinks.

All 134 team pages include cut-to-the-chase commentary from opposing coaches about what to expect this season. We like to think it's the best way to bottom-line the upcoming season.

Speaking of Saban, college football's biggest change (aside from the expanded playoff — more on that in a minute) — is the retirement of the game's greatest coach. Alex Kirshner assesses the transition from Saban to DeBoer in his feature "Life After Saban" on p. 28.

The other big news this year — the 12-team playoff. College football editor Steven Lassan has pored over the rosters and schedules (while keeping an eye on the portal) to assemble this year's field. Bracketology has come to college football, and our predicted bracket is on p. 8.

It takes a small village to compile a season preview — especially in this new Wild West reality of unfettered transfers — and this year, we got some help from some new sources. The experts at On3 have been kind enough to share national and team-by-team recruiting data, as well as providing some of the team previews. We appreciate their help and support with this year's magazine.

With all the monumental changes, 2024 represents a watershed moment in college football. We hope you enjoy our preview, as well as the season to come.

Rob Doster

Rob Doster, Managing Editor

ATHLON SPORTS

EDITORIAL

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Georgia QB Carson Beck and HC Kirby Smart

2024 TOP 25

1. GEORGIA

Georgia's hopes of a three-peat were derailed by Nick Saban and a loss to Alabama in the SEC Championship Game last season. Saban's retirement removed one obstacle in the Bulldogs' challenging path in the SEC, but the schedule isn't getting any easier in '24 with road dates at Alabama, Ole Miss and conference newcomer Texas. Although the path is more challenging than it was last year, the Bulldogs are equipped to return to the top of college football. Quarterback Carson Beck passed on the NFL for one more season in Athens and is one of the frontrunners for the Heisman Trophy after throwing for 3,941 yards and 24 scores in his debut. Beck won't have to do it alone, either, as the offensive line and receiving corps rank among the best in college football. Running back Trevor Etienne transferred from one of Georgia's rivals (Florida) to fill a void in the backfield. Head coach Kirby Smart's defense wasn't quite up to its dominant performance in '22 but still held opponents to 15.6 points per contest. Getting better against the run, generating more pressure on the pocket and filling a few voids in the secondary are all concerns for Smart this offseason. However, all of those question marks are eased with a roster full of 5-star talent at every level of the depth chart. The new playoff format creates more obstacles and an extended path for every team hunting the No. 1 spot. Although more variables create more unpredictability and surprises, Georgia's depth, talent and pursuit of perfection under Smart will be tough to beat once again.

Ohio State RB TreVeyon Henderson and HC Ryan Day

2. OHIO STATE

After three straight losses to Michigan and watching the Wolverines celebrate a national title in '23, head coach Ryan Day spent the offseason motivated to elevate Ohio State back to the top of college football. Mission accomplished. No area of the program was left intact in the overhaul — starting with himself. Day turned over the offensive play-calling duties to former UCLA head coach Chip Kelly among a few staff tweaks. On the recruiting trail, Day landed 5-star prospect Jeremiah Smith to help alleviate the loss of Marvin Harrison Jr. and keep the Buckeyes wide receiver unit atop the nation. And through the portal, Day added a starting quarterback (Will Howard from Kansas State) and landed running back Quinshon Judkins (Ole Miss) to team with TreVeyon Henderson in the nation's No. 1 backfield. Nine starters return from a dominant defense, and help is on the way in the form of transfer safety Caleb Downs from Alabama. With Michigan reloading and the annual showdown in Columbus, Ohio State's busy offseason overhaul came at the right time.

From left: Kim Klement Neitzel-USA TODAY Sports; Adam Cairns/Columbus Dispatch

3. OREGON

For the last two years under head coach Dan Lanning, the Ducks have entered November on the doorstep of a CFB Playoff appearance. Even though Oregon is migrating to the Big Ten, the goal is simple: Finish. Lanning took steps to ensure the Ducks could take the next step in the rugged Big Ten by landing transfer quarterback Dillon Gabriel (Oklahoma) to replace Bo Nix and reeling in a top-five recruiting haul. The portal also brought receiver Evan Stewart (Texas A&M) to team with Tez Johnson, who returns after catching 86 passes last fall. Standout center Jackson Powers-Johnson will be missed, but the Ducks return a strong foundation in the trenches with three starters back. Lanning dipped into the transfer ranks on defense, too, picking up a key contributor in the trenches (Jamaree Caldwell) and four players in the secondary, including former Washington cornerback Jabbar Muhammad. Oregon will be heavy favorites in its first five contests. However, Oct. 12 looms large as Big Ten title favorite Ohio State visits Eugene in the Ducks' marquee matchup in their new conference debut.

4. TEXAS

Last season's CFB Playoff appearance paused the perennial preseason debate of whether or not Texas was actually back. After silencing the doubters, the Longhorns now must prove that '23 wasn't a fluke. The road to a repeat won't get any easier as the program shifts to the SEC. However, thanks to elite recruiting and talent development, Texas is poised for another trip to the playoff. Quarterback Quinn Ewers returns for his third season under center and is aided by four returning starters — including preseason All-American Kelvin Banks Jr. — up front. Head coach Steve Sarkisian restocked a depleted receiving corps with a trio of key transfer pickups and returns a standout one-two punch at running back in Jaydon Blue and CJ Baxter. The biggest concerns for the Longhorns rest on defense. Replacing 300-pound stalwarts in T'Vondre Sweat and Byron Murphy II on the interior of the line won't be easy, and there's plenty of room to improve against the pass.

5. OLE MISS

Lane Kiffin and the Rebels are all in for 2024. After winning 11 games last season, and in anticipation of the expansion of the CFB Playoff, Ole Miss landed one of college football's top transfer hauls, including a handful of additions to improve a struggling defense. Lineman Walter Nolen (Texas A&M), linebacker Chris Paul (Arkansas) and defensive backs Trey Amos (Alabama) and Brandon Turnage (Tennessee) arrive in Oxford to give coordinator Pete Golding the necessary pieces to improve that side of the ball. As usual, Kiffin will have one of the SEC's top offenses. Quarterback Jaxson Dart is back, and a few additions from the portal have added to the firepower at the skill positions.

6. ALABAMA

New coach, same high standards. Kalen DeBoer has big shoes to fill as Nick Saban's replacement, and although the Crimson Tide have holes to fill along the offensive line, in the receiving corps and in an overhauled secondary, the new staff won't get much of a honeymoon period in Tuscaloosa. While DeBoer will be under pressure to win right away, the pieces are in place for a return to the CFB Playoff. Quarterback Jalen Milroe should thrive in DeBoer's high-powered scheme, and Saban left behind plenty of talent on both sides of the ball. An early showdown against Georgia on Sept. 28 provides an early opportunity to make a statement in the SEC.

7. MICHIGAN

The reigning national champs return only five starters, but enough of a foundation remains for new head coach Sherrone Moore to keep this team in the hunt for a Big Ten title. The offense will be a work in progress early in '24 with five new starters up front and a quarterback battle that could extend into the season. However, a defense anchored by tackle Mason Graham and All-America cornerback Will Johnson can carry this team to another double-digit win total. A Week 2 date against Texas in Ann Arbor is a huge early test to see how far along Moore is in his effort to keep Michigan at the top of the Big Ten.

8. PENN STATE

Close is the best way to describe Penn State under coach James Franklin. The Nittany Lions have five double-digit win seasons over the last eight years but have only one Big Ten title and zero CFB Playoff trips in that span. In order to break that drought, Penn State needs quarterback Drew Allar to take a step forward after an up-and-down debut. Allar will benefit from the arrival of former Kansas offensive coordinator Andy Kotelnicki, but question marks remain at receiver. The Nittany Lions have had one of the nation's top defenses in recent years and shouldn't regress much with six starters back under new coordinator Tom Allen.

9. NOTRE DAME

The Fighting Irish hope to pair a dominant defense (15.9 points per game allowed in 2023) to go with a much-improved offense to produce a CFB Playoff run in '24. Former Notre Dame play-caller Mike Denbrock was lured away from LSU after guiding the nation's No. 1 scoring offense last season. Head coach Marcus Freeman also reeled in a couple of key transfers — including former Duke quarterback Riley Leonard — to improve a unit that struggled against some of its top competition last fall. A revamped offensive line replacing first-round pick Joe Alt and fellow tackle Blake Fisher is the biggest concern. The opener at Texas A&M is a key early test, but swing games versus Louisville and Florida State take place in South Bend.

10. MISSOURI

Coming off the program's first double-digit win total (11) since 2014, the Tigers have staying power behind an offense that features quarterback Brady Cook and the nation's top receiver in Luther Burden III. New coordinator Corey Batoon has holes to fill at every level of one of the SEC's top defenses. However, a strong class of transfers and incoming freshmen should keep this group performing at a high level. Also, the schedule is favorable. Head coach Eliah Drinkwitz's squad misses Georgia, Texas and Ole Miss in conference play.

11. LSU

It's safe to assume the Tigers probably won't finish No. 1 nationally in scoring offense with quarterback Jayden Daniels and receivers Brian Thomas Jr. and Malik Nabers off to the NFL. But there's a good chance this group retains its high-scoring ways with rising star quarterback Garrett Nussmeier and new play-caller Joe Sloan leading the way. The Bayou Bengals also expect the defense to take a step forward under new coordinator Blake Baker after a disastrous 2023 season. Baker built one of the SEC's top defenses at Missouri and has ample talent to work with in his debut.

12. FLORIDA STATE

After last year's CFB Playoff snub, the Seminoles won't lack motivation in '24. Even with a roster in transition after the departure of several stars — including quarterback Jordan Travis, receiver Keon Coleman, and end Jared Verse — head coach Mike Norvell's squad should be the favorite in the ACC. Norvell hit the transfer portal hard for help on both sides of the ball, landing impact players in quarterback DJ Uiagalelei, receiver Malik Benson, edge rusher Marvin Jones Jr. and defensive back Earl Little. In addition to the portal acquisitions, the Noles return one of the ACC's top offensive and defensive lines.

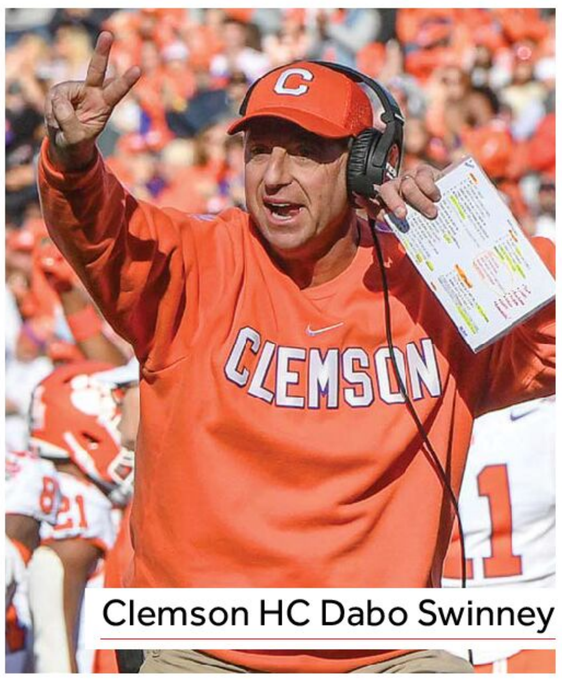
13. TENNESSEE

Josh Heupel's high-octane offense took a step back last season, but a quick rebound is likely in order with rising star quarterback Nico Iamaleava at the controls. Iamaleava — a 5-star prospect in the 2023 signing class — impressed in the Citrus Bowl win over Iowa and is aided by one of the SEC's top receiving corps and offensive lines. Defensive improvement is needed for the Volunteers to make the CFB Playoff. Just three starters are back for '24, and question marks surround a secondary that struggled last year. The outlook is more promising up front. End James Pearce Jr. (10 sacks in '23) is one of the nation's top returning defenders.

14. UTAH

Quarterback Cameron Rising and tight end Brant Kuithe are back after missing all of 2023 due to injury, giving the Utes a major boost to an offense that averaged only 23.2 points per game last season. Also easing Utah's transition to the Big 12 is a defense that once again will be an elite group under coach Kyle Whittingham and coordinator Morgan Scalley. Eight starters return on this side of the ball, and a couple of transfers restock a secondary losing standouts in safeties Cole Bishop and Sione Vaki. An early showdown at Oklahoma State (Sept. 21) could be a preview of the Big 12 Championship Game.

15. CLEMSON


Clemson HC Dabo Swinney

Last season's nine victories marked the first time since 2010 that Clemson failed to reach double-digit wins. However, even though coach Dabo Swinney once again passed on any major additions through the portal, optimism is running high for a return to the ACC Championship Game. The Tigers return only two starters on defense, but this unit is poised to remain among the best in the nation, especially if rising stars like linemen T.J. Parker and Peter Woods and linebacker Sammy Brown develop as expected. But for Clemson to improve, the offense — especially quarterback Cade Klubnik — must take a step forward in coordinator Garrett Riley's second year. The arrival of freshman receivers T.J. Moore and Bryant Wesco Jr. should help to spark a unit that managed only 23.6 points per game in ACC contests last season.

16. OKLAHOMA

A revamped offensive line holds the key to Oklahoma's debut season in the SEC. Assistant Bill Bedenbaugh is one of the nation's top line coaches, but the Sooners lost all five starters in the trenches and will be relying on a handful of transfers to quickly mesh. If the offensive line falls into place, Oklahoma's offense won't have trouble scoring points behind rising star quarterback Jackson Arnold and a deep group of receivers that includes impact transfer Deion Burks. The Sooners took a big step forward on defense under head coach Brent Venables' watch last season and should improve once again with six starters back.

17. KANSAS STATE

The Wildcats were just a handful of plays away from something better than 9-4 last season with all four defeats coming by eight points or fewer. A revamped offensive line could be a work in progress early in the year, but head coach Chris Klieman's team is among the favorites to win the Big 12 with rising star quarterback Avery Johnson and a dynamic backfield headlined by 1,000-yard rusher DJ Giddens. The schedule also breaks in K-State's favor. Key games versus Oklahoma State and Kansas come at home; a showdown

Ken Ruinard

versus new Big 12 foe Arizona is a non-conference matchup; and the Wildcats won't have to play Utah.

18. TEXAS A&M

Former Texas A&M defensive coordinator Mike Elko returns to College Station after a successful 16-9 stint at Duke the last two years. The Aggies haven't lacked talent but have struggled to translate that into on-field results. Elko's blue-collar and no-nonsense approach could quickly change Texas A&M's outlook in '24, especially with the return of quarterback Conner Weigman from injury, along with a defensive front that ranks among the best in the SEC. No schedule in the SEC is easy. However, the Aggies get key swing games versus Notre Dame, Missouri, Texas and LSU in College Station.

19. OKLAHOMA STATE

What a difference a month can make in the college football season. The Cowboys rallied from a 2-2 start in September to finish with 10 wins and a trip to the Big 12 Championship Game. With 20 starters back, Oklahoma State shouldn't need a midseason rally to factor into the conference title mix. Running back Ollie Gordon II returns after leading the nation with 1,732 yards and should have plenty of running lanes behind a veteran offensive line. Quarterback Alan Bowman has room to improve but also gives the team a veteran leader to direct the offense. Head coach Mike Gundy also hopes experience (10 returning starters) translates into improvement for a defense that allowed 28.6 points per game last year.

20. MIAMI

Head coach Mario Cristobal has increased the talent level since arriving prior to the 2022 season, but it's time for the results to show after a 12-13 start. The Hurricanes appear poised to do so in '24, as a pair of Pac-12 transfers — quarterback Cameron Ward (Washington State) and running back Damien Martinez (Oregon State) — provide needed firepower on offense. Cristobal's work on the recruiting trail should give Miami one of the top offensive lines in the nation. The transfer portal also helped to fill a couple of holes on defense, but the secondary remained a concern after spring practice. Key ACC showdowns against Florida State and Virginia Tech take place at home.

21. KANSAS

After posting a 2-10 record in head coach Lance Leipold's Kansas debut in 2021, the Jayhawks have improved their win total in back-to-back seasons. The next logical step? A Big 12 title. That goal is within reach in '24 thanks to the return of quarterback Jalon Daniels after he missed most of last season with a back injury. Daniels is surrounded by a deep group of playmakers, including 1,000-yard rusher Devin Neal. Improvement on defense is a necessity for Kansas to maximize its potential. The Jayhawks allowed 5.9 yards per play in conference action last season and have holes to fill in the trenches.

22. USC

The Trojans held CFB Playoff aspirations in 2023 but underachieved with an 8-5 record. Shortcomings on defense were largely to blame, and head coach Lincoln Riley made fixing that side of the ball the priority this offseason. New coordinator D'Anton Lynn arrives after leading UCLA's defense to a No. 2 ranking in the Pac-12 in points allowed. In addition to a revamped defensive staff, the Trojans also added a couple of impact transfers to speed the improvement. New quarterback Miller Moss impressed in his first start in the Holiday Bowl, but USC will have to solidify both lines of scrimmage if it wants to make more noise in its Big Ten debut.

23. ARIZONA

New head coach Brent Brennan inherits one of the best situations for any first-year coach. The Wildcats return one of college football's top pass-catch combinations in quarterback Noah Fifita and receiver Tetairoa McMillan to lead an offense that averaged 34.6 points per game last season. Left tackle Jordan Morgan and receiver Jacob Cowing will be missed, however. Improvement on defense was an underrated factor in Arizona's recent rise. This unit held teams to 21.1 points per game last year — down from 36.5 in '22. Matching that total will be a challenge with only five starters back for new defensive coordinator Duane Akina.

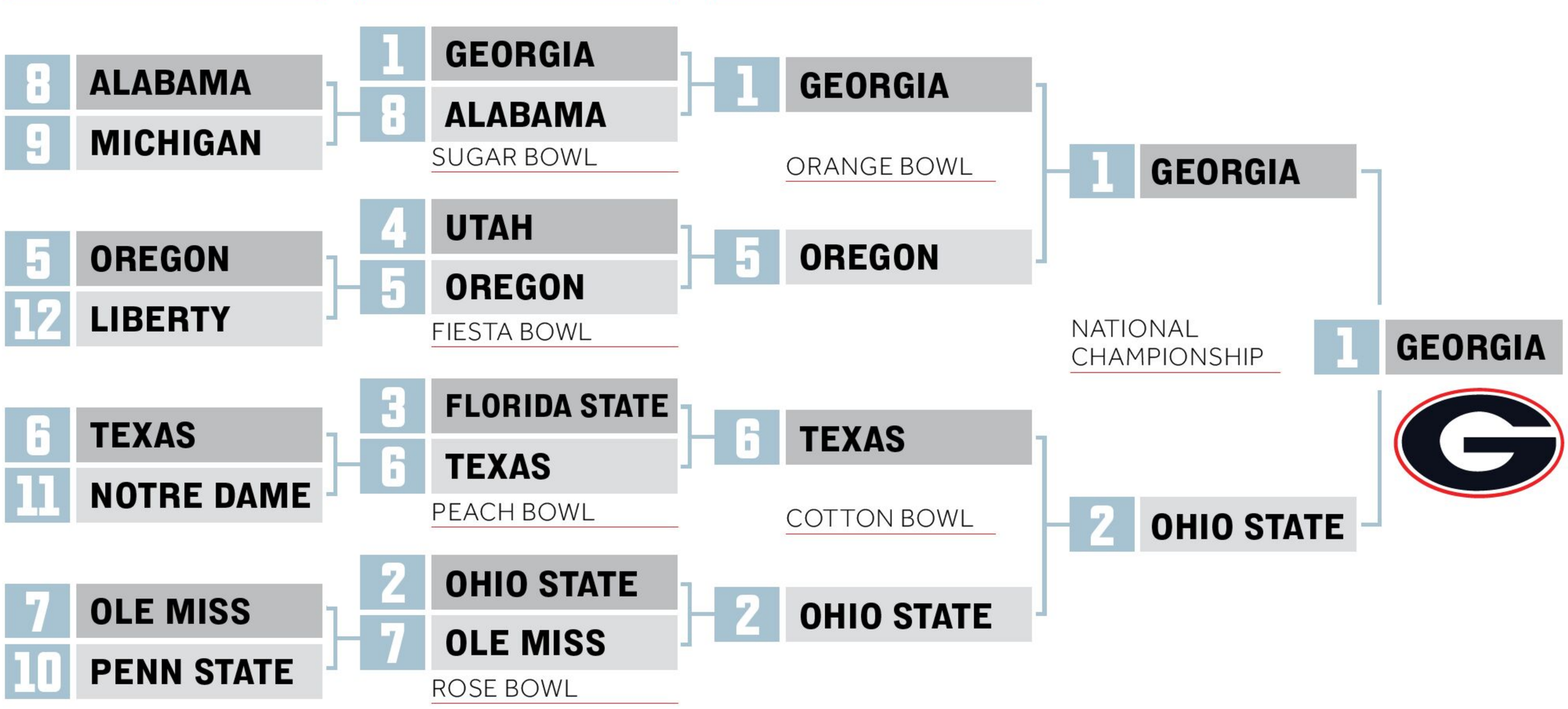
24. LOUISVILLE

After winning 10 games and leading Louisville to an appearance in the ACC Championship Game in his debut, head coach Jeff Brohm faces a high bar in 2024. The Cardinals are primed for a strong encore thanks to a deep haul of transfers that includes quarterback Tyler Shough (Texas Tech), running back Don Chaney (Miami) and receivers Caullin Lacy (South Alabama) and Ja'Corey Brooks (Alabama). End Ashton Gillotte and cornerback Quincy Riley headline nine returning starters from a defense that held teams to 21.3 points per game in '23. The Cardinals also catch a break by missing Florida State, Virginia Tech and NC State in ACC play. Miami also visits Louisville on Oct. 19.

25. NC STATE

The Wolfpack have quietly won at least eight games in each of the last four seasons. Head coach Dave Doeren's squad aims to take the next step by reaching the ACC Championship Game for the first time in program history. That goal is attainable, especially if defensive coordinator Tony Gibson reloads after losing six starters, including All-America linebacker Payton Wilson. The good news is that an offense led by Coastal Carolina transfer quarterback Grayson McCall and dynamic all-around weapon Kevin Concepcion is capable of carrying NC State in the early part of the season.

PLAYOFF BRACKET



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26. West Virginia
27. Virginia Tech
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30. Liberty
31. SMU
32. Auburn
33. Nebraska
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58. Michigan State
59. UCLA
60. Illinois
61. UNLV
62. Fresno State
63. Mississippi State
64. Pittsburgh
65. Northwestern
66. Baylor
67. Arizona State
68. BYU
69. Duke
70. Wake Forest
71. Indiana
72. Virginia
73. Cincinnati
74. Miami (Ohio)
75. Houston
76. Purdue
77. Air Force
78. Colorado State
79. Stanford
80. Vanderbilt
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87. Jacksonville State
88. Arkansas State
89. Wyoming
90. Army
91. Rice
92. Utah State
93. Louisiana
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95. San Diego State
96. Florida Atlantic
97. Troy
98. Hawaii
99. East Carolina
100. Marshall
101. Coastal Carolina
102. Old Dominion
103. North Texas
104. Navy
105. Northern Illinois
106. Bowling Green
107. Georgia Southern
108. Western Michigan
109. Eastern Michigan
110. UAB
111. Tulsa
112. Southern Miss
113. Central Michigan
114. Ohio
115. FIU
116. Sam Houston
117. San José State
118. New Mexico
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122. Louisiana Tech
123. Georgia State
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Iowa State vs. UTSA

BAHAMAS
CUSA vs. MAC
Eastern Michigan vs. FIU

BIRMINGHAM
SEC vs. American/ACC
South Carolina vs. Tulane

CITRUS
Big Ten vs. SEC
Missouri vs. Iowa

BOCA RATON
American/CUSA/MAC/Sun Belt
UCF vs. Appalachian State

CAMELLIA
Sun Belt vs. MAC/CUSA
Bowling Green vs. South Alabama

CURE
American/CUSA/MAC/Sun Belt
Memphis vs. Miami, Ohio

DUKE'S MAYO
ACC vs. Big Ten/SEC
Louisville vs. Rutgers

FAMOUS IDAHO POTATO
MAC vs. Mountain West
Air Force vs. Western Michigan

FENWAY
ACC vs. American
Georgia Tech vs. South Florida

FIRST RESPONDER
Big 12 vs. AAC/CUSA/ACC
Boston College vs. TCU

FRISCO
American/CUSA/MAC/Sun Belt
Wyoming vs. Rice

GASPARILLA
SEC vs. ACC/American
SMU vs. Florida

GATOR
SEC vs. ACC
Miami vs. LSU

GUARANTEED RATE
Big 12 vs. Big Ten
Texas Tech vs. Minnesota

HAWAII
Mountain West vs. CUSA
Fresno State vs. Jacksonville State

HOLIDAY
Pac-12 vs. ACC
Virginia Tech vs. Washington

INDEPENDENCE
Pac-12 vs. Army
Oregon State vs. Army

LA BOWL
Mountain West vs. Pac-12
Boise State vs. California

LAS VEGAS
Pac-12 vs. Big Ten/SEC
Texas A&M vs. Arizona

LIBERTY
SEC vs. Big 12
West Virginia vs. Auburn

MILITARY
ACC vs. American
Syracuse vs. East Carolina

MUSIC CITY
Big Ten vs. SEC
Kentucky vs. Wisconsin

MYRTLE BEACH
American/CUSA/MAC/Sun Belt
James Madison vs. Florida Atlantic

NEW MEXICO
Mountain West vs. CUSA
UNLV vs. Texas State

NEW ORLEANS
CUSA vs. Sun Belt
Western Kentucky vs. Louisiana

PINSTRIPE
Big Ten vs. ACC
NC State vs. Maryland

POP-TARTS
ACC vs. Big 12
Clemson vs. Oklahoma State

QUICK LANE
MAC vs. Big Ten
Michigan State vs. Northern Illinois

RELIAQUEST
Big Ten vs. SEC
Tennessee vs. Nebraska

SUN
ACC vs. Pac-12
North Carolina vs. Colorado

TEXAS
Big 12 vs. SEC
Kansas vs. Oklahoma

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

FIRST ROUND
No. 5 Oregon vs. No. 12 Liberty
No. 6 Texas vs. No. 11 Notre Dame
No. 7 Ole Miss vs. No. 10 Penn State
No. 8 Alabama vs. No. 9 Michigan

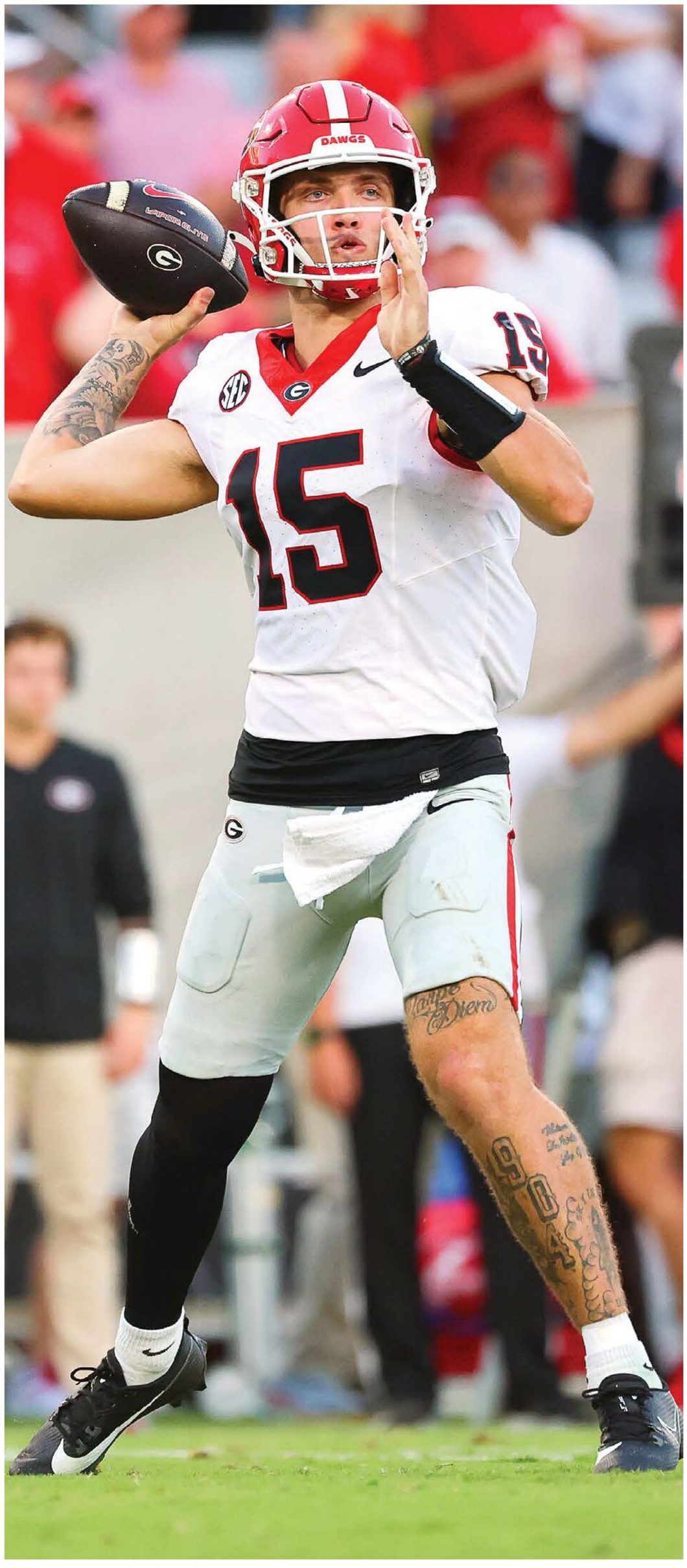
QUARTERFINALS
Fiesta Bowl
No. 4 Utah vs. No. 5 Oregon
Peach Bowl
No. 3 Florida State vs. No. 6 Texas
Rose Bowl
No. 2 Ohio State vs. No. 7 Ole Miss
Sugar Bowl
No. 1 Georgia vs. No. 8 Alabama

SEMIFINALS
Orange Bowl
No. 1 Georgia vs. No. 5 Oregon
Cotton Bowl
No. 2 Ohio State vs. No. 6 Texas

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP
No. 1 Georgia vs. No. 2 Ohio State

ALL-AMERICA

1ST TEAM



Carson Beck, QB, Georgia

OFFENSE

QB	CARSON BECK GEORGIA	
RB	OLLIE GORDON II OKLAHOMA STATE	
RB	TREVEYON HENDERSON OHIO STATE	
AP	TRAVIS HUNTER COLORADO	
WR	TETAIROA MCMILLAN ARIZONA	
WR	LUTHER BURDEN III MISSOURI	
WR	EMEKA EGBUKA OHIO STATE	
TE	COLSTON LOVELAND MICHIGAN	
OL	WILL CAMPBELL LSU	
OL	KELVIN BANKS JR. TEXAS	
OL	TATE RATLEDGE GEORGIA	
OL	DONOVAN JACKSON OHIO STATE	
OL	TYLER BOOKER ALABAMA	

Kim Klement Neitzel-USA TODAY Sports

JT Tuimoloau, DL, Ohio State

Will Johnson, CB, Michigan

DEFENSE

DL	JAMES PEARCE JR. TENNESSEE	
DL	MASON GRAHAM MICHIGAN	
DL	HOWARD CROSS III NOTRE DAME	
DL	JT TUIMOLOAU OHIO STATE	
LB	DANNY STUTSMAN OKLAHOMA	
LB	HAROLD PERKINS JR. LSU	
LB	JAY HIGGINS IOWA	
LB	BARRETT CARTER CLEMSON	
CB	WILL JOHNSON MICHIGAN	
CB	DENZEL BURKE OHIO STATE	
S	CALEB DOWNS OHIO STATE	
S	MALAKI STARKS GEORGIA	

SPECIALISTS

K	GRAHAM NICHOLSON ALABAMA	
P	ALEX MASTROMANNO FLORIDA STATE	
KR	JAYDEN HARRISON NOTRE DAME	
PR	ZACHARIAH BRANCH USC	

Jayden Harrison, KR, Notre Dame

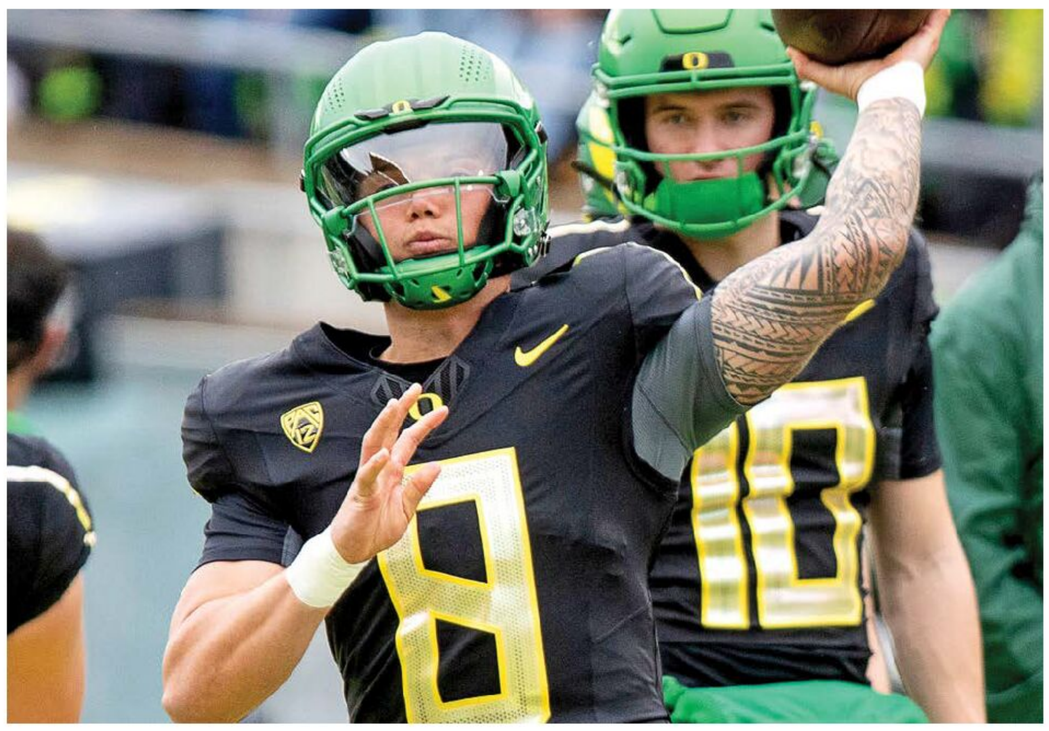
Tuimoloau: Kyle Robertson/Columbus Dispatch; Johnson: Junfu Han; Harrison: Austin Hough / South Bend Tribune

ATHLON SPORTS ALL-AMERICA TEAM

2ND TEAM

OFFENSE

QB	DILLON GABRIEL OREGON	
RB	OMARION HAMPTON NORTH CAROLINA	
RB	QUINSHON JUDKINS OHIO STATE	
AP	ASHTON JEANTY BOISE STATE	
WR	TRE HARRIS OLE MISS	
WR	TEZ JOHNSON OREGON	
WR	EVAN STEWART OREGON	
TE	BRANT KUITHE UTAH	
OL	LUKE KANDRA CINCINNATI	
OL	WYATT MILUM WEST VIRGINIA	
OL	CLAY WEBB JACKSONVILLE STATE	
OL	AIREONTAE ERSERY MINNESOTA	
OL	JOSH CONERLY JR. OREGON	



Dillon Gabriel, QB, Oregon

DEFENSE

DL	JACK SAWYER OHIO STATE	
DL	DEONE WALKER KENTUCKY	
DL	ASHTON GILLOTTE LOUISVILLE	
DL	NIC SCOURTON TEXAS A&M	
LB	JASON HENDERSON OLD DOMINION	
LB	NICKOLAS MARTIN OKLAHOMA STATE	
LB	MYKEL WILLIAMS GEORGIA	
LB	NICK JACKSON IOWA	
CB	TRAVIS HUNTER COLORADO	
CB	BENJAMIN MORRISON NOTRE DAME	
S	XAVIER WATTS NOTRE DAME	
S	DILLON THIENEMAN PURDUE	

SPECIALISTS

K	ANDRES BORREGALES MIAMI	
P	JAMES BURNIP ALABAMA	
KR	BARION BROWN KENTUCKY	
PR	JACOB DE JESUS UNLV	

Ben Lonergan/The Register-Guard

3RD TEAM

OFFENSE

QB	JALEN MILROE ALABAMA	
RB	TAHJ BROOKS TEXAS TECH	
RB	DONOVAN EDWARDS MICHIGAN	
AP	JAYDN OTT CALIFORNIA	
WR	RICKY WHITE III UNLV	
WR	TORY HORTON COLORADO STATE	
WR	XAVIER RESTREPO MIAMI	
TE	MITCHELL EVANS NOTRE DAME	
OL	EARNEST GREENE GEORGIA	
OL	JALEN RIVERS MIAMI	
OL	EMERY JONES LSU	
OL	DARIUS WASHINGTON FLORIDA STATE	
OL	AJANI CORNELIUS OREGON	

Darren Yamashita-USA TODAY Sports

Jaydn Ott, AP, California

DEFENSE

DL	TYLEIK WILLIAMS OHIO STATE	
DL	RUEBEN BAIN JR. MIAMI	
DL	PATRICK PAYTON FLORIDA STATE	
DL	WALTER NOLEN OLE MISS	
LB	KAIMON RUCKER NORTH CAROLINA	
LB	JEFFREY BASSA OREGON	
LB	COLLIN OLIVER OKLAHOMA STATE	
LB	FRANCISCO MAUIGOA MIAMI	
CB	JABBAR MUHAMMAD OREGON	
CB	SEBASTIAN CASTRO IOWA	
S	BILLY BOWMAN JR. OKLAHOMA	
S	MALACHI MOORE ALABAMA	

SPECIALISTS

K	JONAH DALMAS BOISE STATE	
P	BRETT THORSON GEORGIA	
KR	BRASHARD SMITH SMU	
PR	TUCKER HOLLOWAY VIRGINIA TECH	

24TH ANNUAL

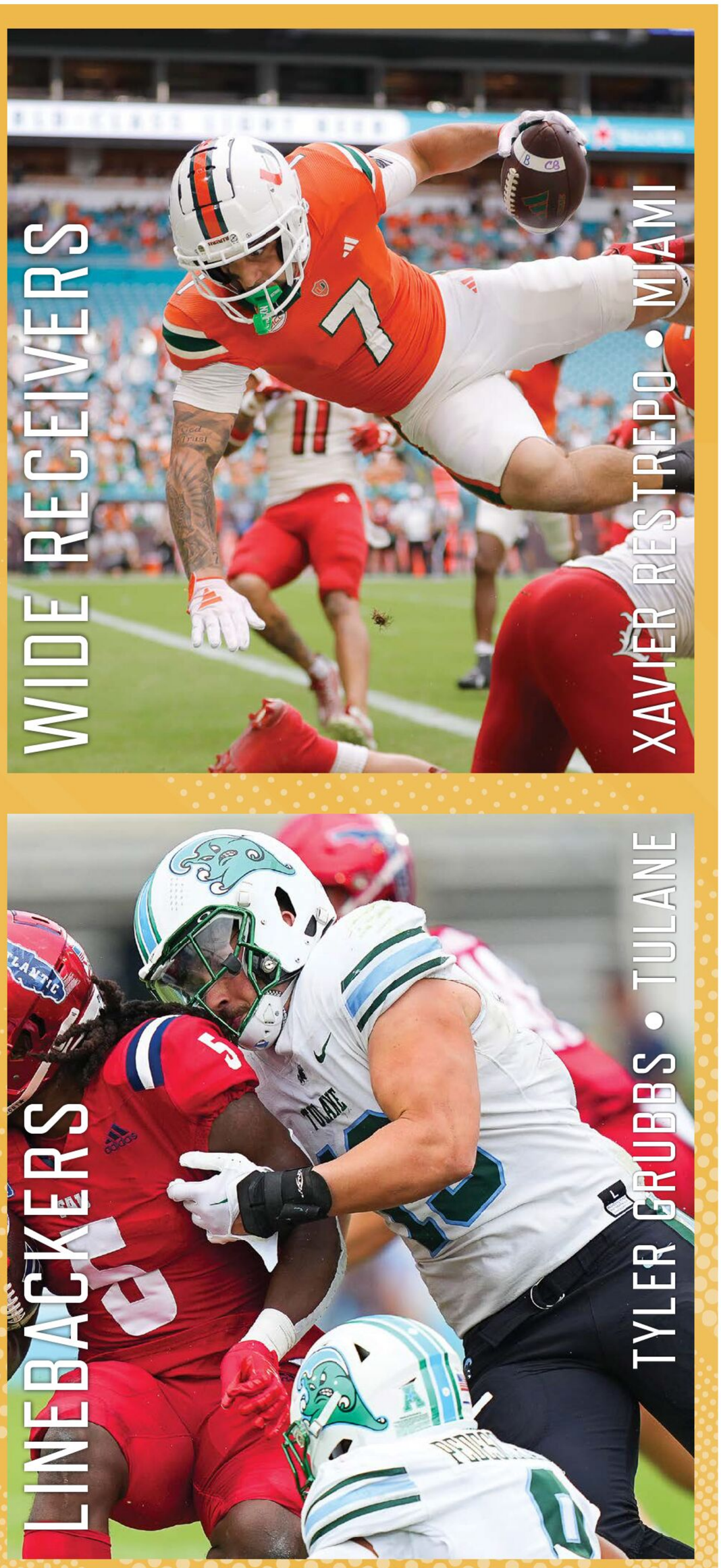
UNIT RANKINGS

ACC

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Boston College	11	12	17	8	11	17	15
California	13	4	13	15	15	6	11
Clemson	7	6	8	4	2	1	1
Duke	12	14	11	17	16	16	7
Florida State	2	2	4	2	1	3	2
Georgia Tech	3	7	9	5	12	14	13
Louisville	9	8	5	6	5	5	4
Miami	1	1	1	1	4	2	6
North Carolina	10	3	6	11	8	8	10
NC State	4	9	3	3	6	11	5
Pitt	17	13	15	12	14	15	14
SMU	5	10	2	7	7	7	9
Stanford	16	17	12	16	17	12	17
Syracuse	8	11	16	10	13	4	8
Virginia	14	16	14	13	9	10	12
Virginia Tech	6	5	7	9	3	9	3
Wake Forest	15	15	10	14	10	13	16

AMERICAN

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Army	10	9	14	10	9	9	9
Charlotte	12	11	12	12	10	12	11
East Carolina	11	8	10	8	3	8	4
FAU	9	13	9	11	7	7	7
Memphis	1	7	1	1	4	3	5
Navy	13	10	13	7	8	4	8
North Texas	6	6	6	9	11	10	10
Rice	4	5	5	6	6	5	3
Temple	14	14	11	14	13	13	14
Tulane	7	1	4	4	1	1	1
Tulsa	8	3	7	13	14	14	12
UAB	3	12	8	5	12	11	13
South Florida	2	4	3	2	5	6	6
UTSA	5	2	2	3	2	2	2



From top: Sam Navarro-USA TODAY Sports; Jim Rassol-USA TODAY Sports

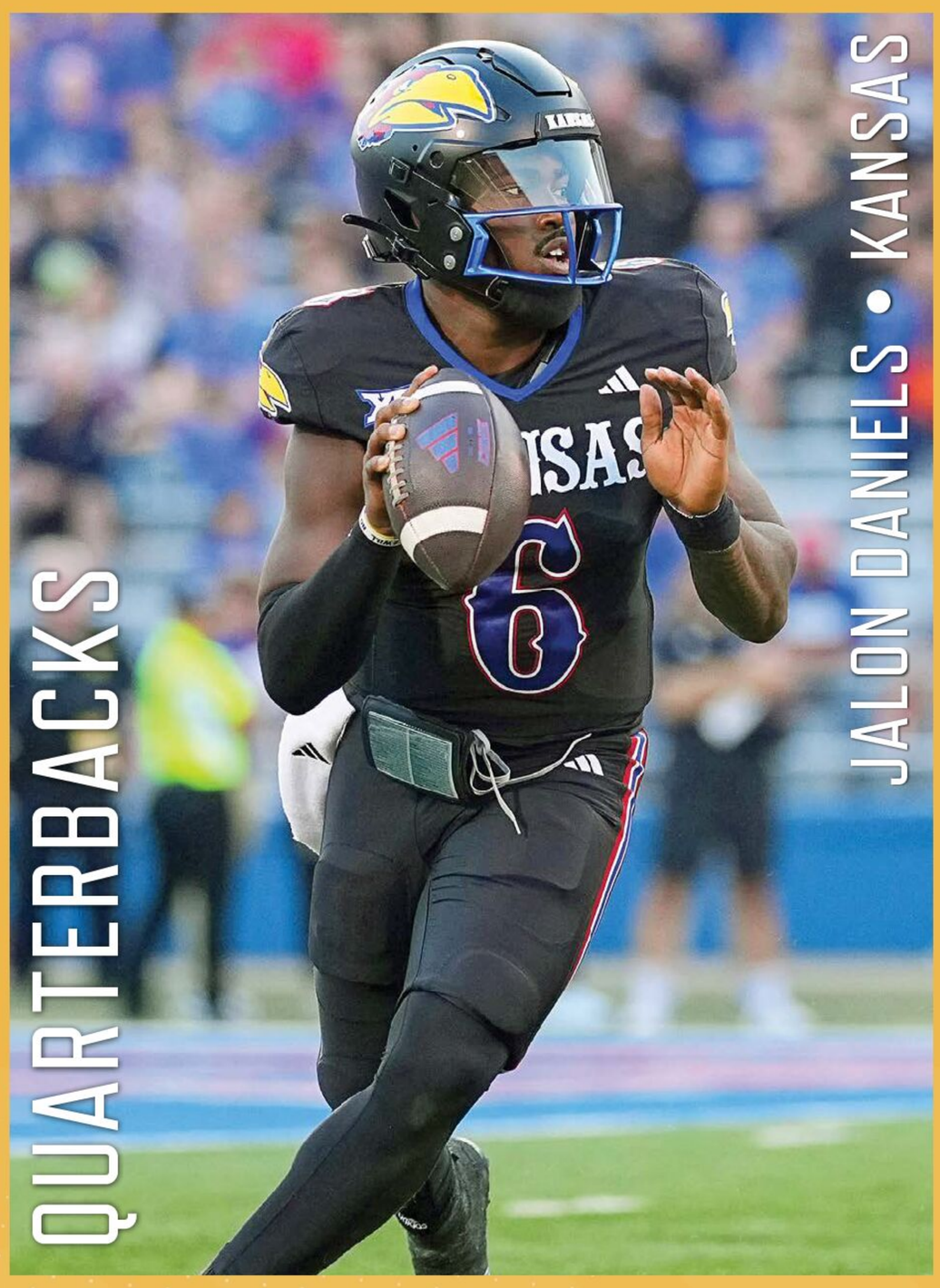
BIG 12

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Arizona	3	14	2	4	10	7	6
Arizona State	6	9	14	14	12	11	12
Baylor	9	12	12	12	15	13	13
BYU	15	16	13	13	13	14	15
Cincinnati	14	8	15	5	11	12	14
Colorado	2	11	1	15	14	16	10
Houston	11	15	16	16	16	15	16
Iowa State	8	10	4	6	2	3	2
Kansas	1	2	3	8	9	9	3
Kansas State	7	4	11	7	3	4	5
Oklahoma State	12	1	5	1	4	1	4
TCU	13	13	7	10	6	5	8
Texas Tech	10	6	8	9	8	8	11
UCF	6	3	9	11	7	10	9
Utah	4	7	10	3	1	2	1
West Virginia	5	5	12	2	5	6	7

BIG TEN

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Illinois	16	16	17	11	17	14	16
Indiana	11	18	9	13	15	18	18
Iowa	13	8	18	10	5	1	3
Maryland	12	10	8	14	9	9	14
Michigan	9	4	4	3	2	2	2
Michigan State	6	13	12	12	14	13	11
Minnesota	14	9	13	4	12	11	12
Nebraska	7	12	11	7	6	8	6
Northwestern	18	17	14	16	10	15	13
Ohio State	1	1	2	2	1	4	1
Oregon	2	3	1	1	4	3	5
Penn State	3	2	5	6	3	5	4
Purdue	10	15	15	18	18	17	15
Rutgers	17	5	16	9	8	7	8
UCLA	15	11	10	17	16	16	17
USC	4	7	3	8	7	10	9
Washington	5	14	6	15	13	12	10
Wisconsin	8	6	7	5	11	6	7

From top: Jay Biggerstaff-USA TODAY Sports; Adam Cairns/Columbus Dispatch



CUSA

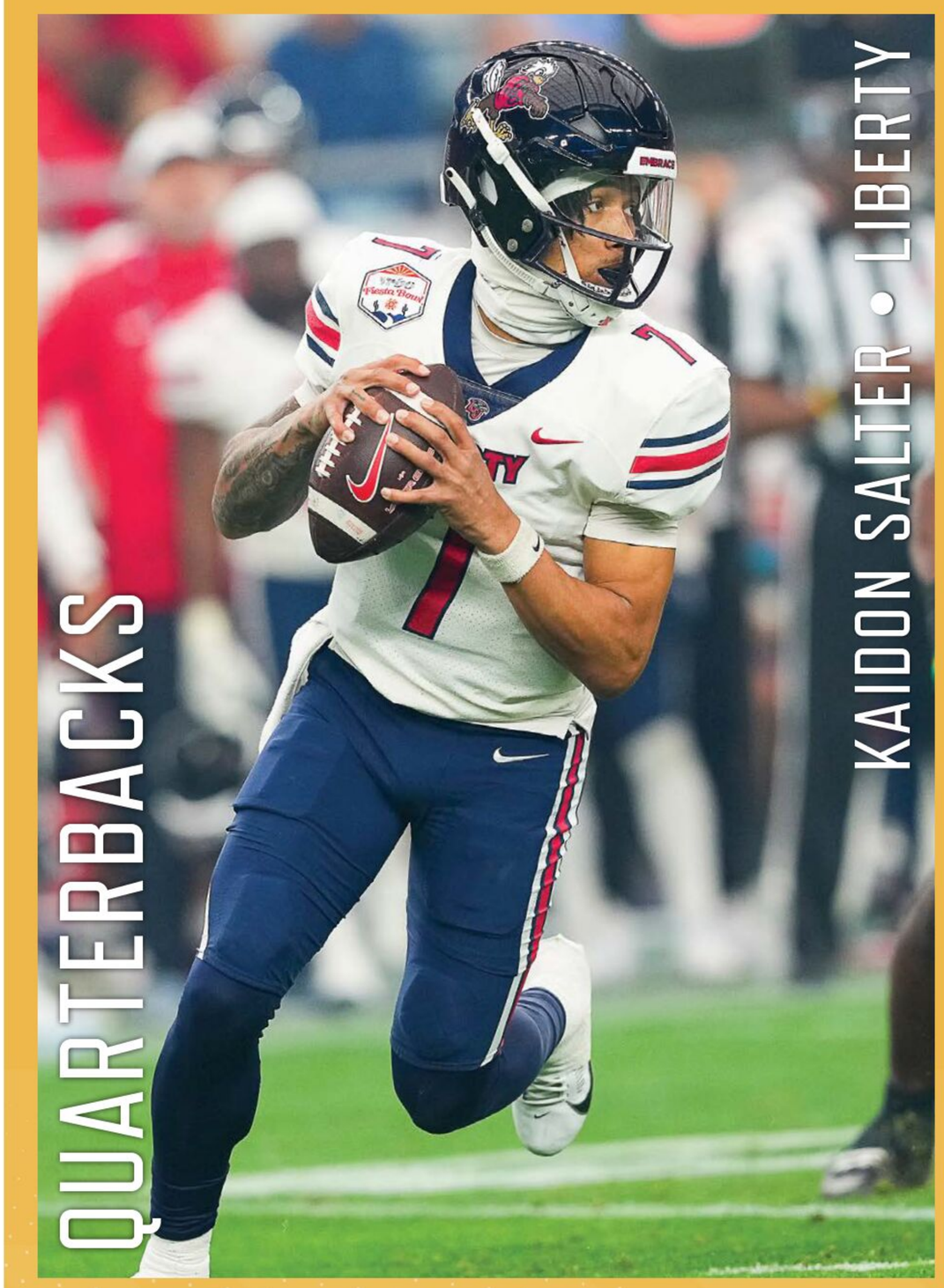
	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
FIU	5	2	4	6	6	7	4
Jacksonville State	3	3	6	3	5	5	3
Kennesaw State	10	8	10	10	10	10	10
Liberty	1	1	3	1	1	1	2
Louisiana Tech	6	5	5	8	8	8	8
Middle Tennessee	4	6	7	7	7	4	6
New Mexico State	9	4	8	4	9	6	7
Sam Houston	7	10	2	5	3	2	5
UTEP	8	9	9	9	4	9	6
WKU	2	7	1	2	2	3	1

MAC

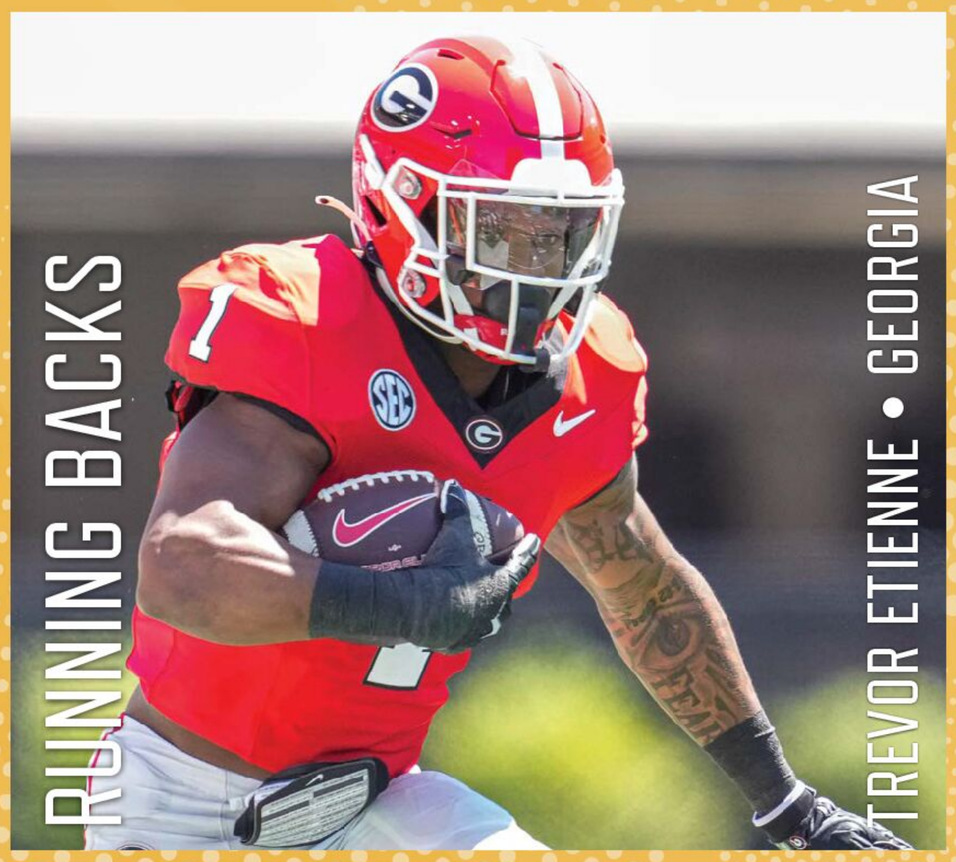
	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Akron	9	10	12	12	5	4	9
Ball State	11	12	11	8	11	10	11
Bowling Green	2	3	6	4	2	3	3
Buffalo	12	9	10	7	9	9	8
Central Michigan	6	5	5	6	8	7	7
Eastern Michigan	4	11	8	9	6	6	5
Kent State	8	8	7	11	12	12	12
Miami (Ohio)	1	7	4	1	1	1	1
Northern Illinois	10	1	2	2	4	8	2
Ohio	7	6	9	10	10	11	10
Toledo	3	4	1	5	3	2	4
Western Michigan	5	2	3	3	7	5	6

MOUNTAIN WEST

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Air Force	12	7	12	5	3	6	1
Boise State	2	1	1	1	1	1	2
Colorado State	4	10	3	7	5	5	6
Fresno State	1	3	4	4	6	4	3
Hawaii	3	12	5	10	12	8	12
Nevada	10	8	11	9	11	7	10
New Mexico	8	9	9	12	7	12	11
San Diego State	6	4	8	8	9	10	8
San Jose State	11	11	7	11	10	9	9
UNLV	5	6	2	2	4	2	7
Utah State	7	5	6	6	8	11	5
Wyoming	9	2	10	3	2	3	4



From top: Joe Camporeale-USA TODAY Sports; Robert Hanashiro-USA TODAY Sports



SEC

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Alabama	3	2	7	4	2	2	2
Arkansas	13	13	13	14	13	14	14
Auburn	11	6	11	11	10	8	6
Florida	9	8	12	10	11	12	12
Georgia	2	1	4	1	1	1	1
Kentucky	12	14	10	9	7	3	9
LSU	7	11	9	2	12	4	10
Missouri	6	9	2	6	8	10	7
Miss. State	15	15	15	16	15	15	16
Oklahoma	10	12	5	12	9	5	5
Ole Miss	4	4	1	7	5	7	3
South Carolina	14	10	14	13	14	13	11
Tennessee	5	7	6	5	6	11	13
Texas	1	3	3	3	4	6	4
Texas A&M	8	5	8	8	3	9	8
Vanderbilt	16	16	16	15	16	16	15

SUN BELT

	QB	RB	WR	OL	DL	LB	DB
Appalachian State	2	1	1	1	2	2	1
Arkansas State	3	6	2	6	8	9	6
Coastal Carolina	7	8	6	4	12	8	8
Georgia Southern	11	4	5	8	5	6	9
Georgia State	12	9	10	13	13	11	12
James Madison	4	3	9	3	4	4	3
Louisiana	5	5	7	2	6	3	2
Marshall	10	10	8	9	7	13	4
Old Dominion	9	13	13	12	3	3	13
South Alabama	6	7	4	7	10	12	7
Southern Miss	8	12	12	11	9	10	5
Texas State	1	2	3	5	1	7	3
Troy	13	11	11	10	8	5	8
ULM	14	14	14	14	14	14	14

Dale Zanine-USA TODAY Sports

NATIONAL UNIT RANKINGS

Quarterbacks

1. Texas
2. Georgia
3. Ohio State
4. Oregon
5. Alabama
6. Ole Miss
7. Notre Dame
8. Kansas
9. Colorado
10. Tennessee

Running Backs

1. Ohio State
2. Penn State
3. Georgia
4. Alabama
5. Texas
6. Oklahoma State
7. Kansas
8. UCF
9. Kansas State
10. Liberty

Wide Receivers

1. Oregon
2. Ohio State
3. Ole Miss
4. Missouri
5. Texas
6. Georgia
7. Oklahoma
8. Colorado
9. Miami
10. USC

Offensive Line

1. Georgia
2. LSU
3. Texas
4. Oregon
5. Alabama
6. Tennessee
7. Miami
8. Missouri
9. Oklahoma State
10. Ohio State

Defensive Line

1. Ohio State
2. Michigan
3. Georgia
4. Penn State
5. Alabama
6. Texas A&M
7. Florida State
8. Clemson
9. Notre Dame
10. Texas

Linebackers

1. Georgia
2. Clemson
3. Iowa
4. Michigan
5. Alabama
6. Oregon
7. Ohio State
8. Penn State
9. Kentucky
10. Oklahoma State

Defensive Backs

1. Ohio State
2. Georgia
3. Notre Dame
4. Michigan
5. Iowa
6. Clemson
7. Penn State
8. Oregon
9. Florida State
10. Virginia Tech

2024 HEISMAN WATCH

QUINN EWERS → CARSON BECK

TIER 1

→ QB **QUINN EWERS, Texas** Ewers took a big step forward in his second season as the starter, leading the Longhorns to a Big 12 championship and College Football Playoff berth. The expectations remain high for Ewers even though he's lost his top five pass-catchers from last season.

→ QB **CARSON BECK, Georgia** Beck handled the transition to starter seamlessly, finishing third in the nation with 3,941 passing yards along with 24 TDs and only six interceptions. If Beck can keep the Bulldogs' offense humming (40.1 ppg in 2023), then the Heisman support will follow.

→ QB **JALEN MILROE, Alabama** Milroe's dual-threat abilities were on full display in his first season as the starter (3,365 total yards and 35 scores). Milroe should benefit from new head coach Kalen DeBoer's offensive system, which made Michael Penix Jr. the Heisman runner-up in 2023.

→ QB **JAXSON DART, Ole Miss** Dart threw for 3,364 yards and 23 touchdowns while adding eight more scores on the ground, leading the Rebels to an 11-2 record. He'll remain on the Heisman radar as long as Ole Miss stays relevant in the expanded SEC.

→ QB **DILLON GABRIEL, Oregon** Gabriel has already thrown for 14,865 yards and 125 touchdowns combined in stops at UCF and Oklahoma and now will lead a Ducks offense that features one of the nation's best wide receiver tandems in Tez Johnson and Evan Stewart.

→ QB **NICO IAMALEAVA, Tennessee** The time is now for Iamaleava, the highly regarded 5-star recruit who will take over Josh Heupel's high-octane offense. He flashed his talent (four total TDs) in the Vols' Citrus Bowl win over Iowa.

→ QB **SHEDEUR SANDERS, Colorado** Neither Sanders nor the Buffaloes could sustain their strong start in 2023. Pass protection was an issue, so if that improves and a few more wins follow, Sanders may be a major factor in the race.

→ QB **GARRETT NUSSMEIER, LSU** Nussmeier, the MVP in the ReliaQuest Bowl win over Wisconsin, has big shoes to fill in replacing Jayden Daniels, but he'll be running a system that just produced a Heisman winner.

→ DB/WR **TRAVIS HUNTER, Colorado** The all-purpose dynamo is capable of following in Charles Woodson's Heisman footsteps, but he'll need to pile up the highlights.

→ QB **MILLER MOSS, USC** Moss put up 372 passing yards and six TDs in his first start, a Holiday Bowl rout of Louisville. Lincoln Riley's Heisman résumé alone makes Moss someone to keep an eye on this season.

TIER 2

■ QB **Jalon Daniels, Kansas** A back injury limited him to just three games last season, but Daniels has previously thrived in head coach Lance Leipold's system. If he stays on the field, Daniels has the talent and the supporting cast to allow both him and the Jayhawks the opportunity to make noise in 2024.

■ RB **Donovan Edwards, Michigan** After sharing the workload the past three seasons, Edwards should have the carries to himself in 2024. That should result in monster numbers considering Blake Corum led the nation with 27 rushing touchdowns last season, and Edwards is averaging a healthy 5.7 yards per carry for his career.

■ RB **Ollie Gordon II, Oklahoma State** Gordon was one of the biggest surprises of the 2023 season, leading the nation in rushing with 1,732 yards and scoring 22 total touchdowns. An even bigger campaign could put Gordon in position to become the first running back since Derrick Henry in 2015 to claim the Heisman Trophy.

■ RBs **TreVeyon Henderson/Quinshon Judkins, Ohio State** Barring injury, these two will likely share carries, but what a luxury for new offensive coordinator Chip Kelly. Henderson has already posted big numbers for the Buckeyes, while Judkins transferred after two standout seasons at Ole Miss.

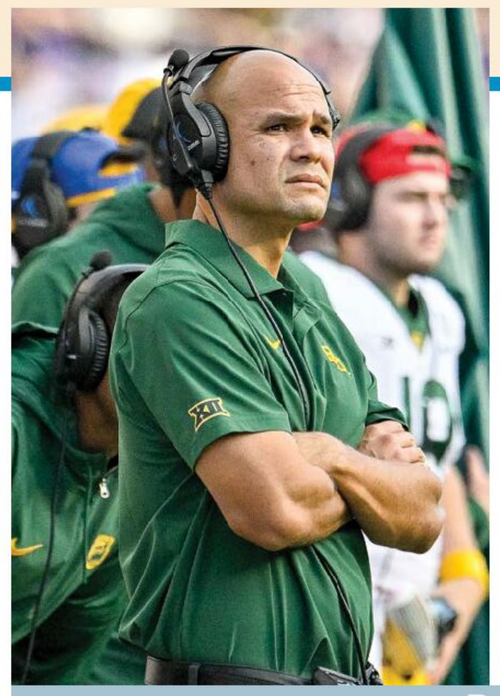
■ WR **Luther Burden III, Missouri** Burden showed why he was a 5-star recruit coming out of college, recording 86 catches (No. 2 in the SEC) for 1,212 yards and nine touchdowns as a sophomore. His all-purpose ability will give him plenty of opportunities to post big numbers.

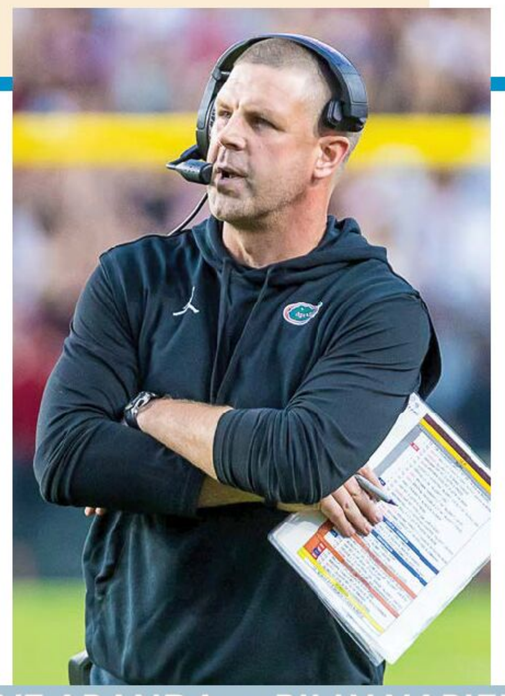
DON'T FORGET ABOUT...

QB Drew Allar, Penn State → RBs Kaytron Allen/Nicholas Singleton, Penn State → QB Jackson Arnold, Oklahoma S Caleb Downs, Ohio State → QB Noah Fifita, Arizona RB Omarion Hampton, North Carolina → QB Will Howard, Ohio State → RB Ashton Jeanty, Boise State → QB Avery Johnson, Kansas State → QB Cade Klubnik, Clemson QB Riley Leonard, Notre Dame → WR Tetairoa McMillan, Arizona → QB Cameron Rising, Utah → S Malaki Starks, Georgia → QB DJ Uiagalelei, Florida State → QB Cameron Ward, Miami → QB Conner Weigman, Texas A&M

Ewers: Aaron E. Martinez/American-Statesman; Beck: Kim Klement Neitzel-USA TODAY Sports

COACHES ON THE HOT SEAT





DAVE ARANDA → BILLY NAPIER

→ DAVE ARANDA, Baylor

A Big 12 title with a No. 5 finish in the final Associated Press ranking for 2021 is the highlight of Aranda's tenure at Baylor. However, that season is the outlier through four years. The Bears are just 11-23 otherwise and won only two contests in Big 12 play last year. Aranda made big changes this offseason to get the program back on track. He plans to take over the defensive play-calling duties after this group surrendered 33.3 points per contest in '23. Aranda also hired Jake Spavital as offensive coordinator to spark a unit that averaged only 23.1 points per game last fall.

→ MIKE BLOOMGREN, Rice

Rice is a tough job, but Bloomgren has yet to record a winning season since taking over in 2018. The Owls went 7-23 from 2018-20 but have made some modest improvement by going 15-23 over the last three years. Also, the program is coming off its best season under Bloomgren. The Owls went 6-7 and earned a bowl trip after APR scores allowed the program to make a postseason appearance with a losing record in '23, just as they had in '22. But with the recent changes in realignment to the American Athletic Conference, Bloomgren is under pressure to show that the program can move up the pecking order in '24.

→ SONNY CUMBIE, Louisiana Tech

Cumbie's hire was met with optimism after a solid stint as Texas Tech's interim coach over the final five games of 2021, which included a blowout win over Mississippi State in the Liberty Bowl. However, the initial momentum generated from Cumbie's arrival has fizzled with a 6-18 record. The Bulldogs have posted identical finishes (3-9 overall and 2-6 in Conference USA play) in each of the last two seasons. Also, the offense (Cumbie's side of the ball) has not ranked higher than fifth in the conference in scoring.

→ STAN DRAYTON, Temple

Temple has been trending in the wrong direction since the program recorded five straight bowl trips from 2015-19. Drayton was hired to pull the Owls out of the recent slide after Rod Carey's firing in '21, but progress has been hard to find over the last two years. The Owls have posted identical records (3-9 overall and 1-7 in American Athletic Conference play) under Drayton's watch. Just one of Temple's losses in '23 was decided by one score, while two of the program's six wins under Drayton have come against FCS opponents.

→ WILL HALL, Southern Miss

As a native of Mississippi and with successful coaching stints in Division II at West Alabama and West Georgia, Hall seemed like the perfect fit for Southern Miss. The Golden Eagles went 3-9 in his debut (2021) but improved to 7-6 the following year. However, the program regressed in '23 to 3-9 once again, bringing Hall's overall record to 13-24 and setting up a potential make-or-break campaign in '24.

→ BILLY NAPIER, Florida

Napier inherited a roster in need of repair and a program that required plenty of behind-the-scenes work to get the Gators back to winning at a high level. However, patience is in short supply in the SEC. Although progress has been made in some areas, Florida is just 11-14 under Napier. The Gators are 6-10 in SEC play over the last two years, have made some questionable in-game coaching decisions, were dominated by rival Georgia in back-to-back meetings and finished '23 on a five-game losing streak. After some early optimism in recruiting, Florida's '24 signing class was hit with late decommitments and slid to No. 14 nationally — only adding to the building pressure on Napier going into the fall.

→ MIKE NEU, Ball State

A MAC Championship and a seven-win season in 2020 are the biggest highlights of Neu's eight-year run in Muncie. The former Ball State quarterback guided the program to back-to-back bowl trips in 2020-21, but the Cardinals are 9-15 overall and 6-10 in MAC contests in the last two seasons. Neu is 37-56 overall and just 23-29 in conference action since taking over at his alma mater in '16.

→ SAM PITTMAN, Arkansas

Arkansas was a much-improved team in Pittman's first year (2020) and finished 9-4 in his second season. However, the Razorbacks have since trended in the wrong direction. Pittman's team went 7-6 in '22 and finished 4-8 last season, closing the season with blowout losses to SEC rivals Auburn and Missouri by a combined score of 96-24. After winning seven SEC games in his first two years, Pittman has managed only four over the last two seasons. The hire of former Arkansas coach Bobby Petrino as offensive coordinator will make or break Pittman's tenure in Fayetteville.

GETTING WARM

TONY ELLIOTT, VIRGINIA

MIKE HOUSTON, EAST CAROLINA

CHARLES HUFF, MARSHALL

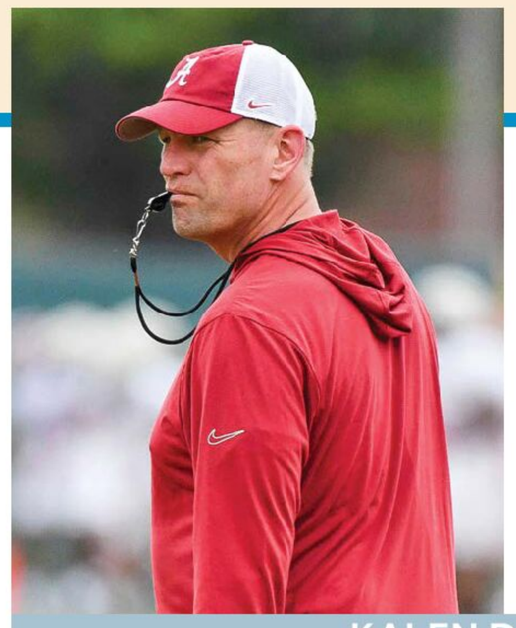
CLARK LEA, VANDERBILT

JIM MCELWAIN, CENTRAL MICHIGAN

PAT NARDUZZI, PITT

Aranda: Jerome Miron-USA TODAY Sport; Napier: Jeff Blake-

GRADING 2024'S NEW HEAD COACHES



KALEN DEBOER → JONATHAN SMITH

1. KALEN DEBOER → ALABAMA — Grade: A+
Previous Job: Washington Head Coach
Nick Saban leaves big shoes to fill, but DeBoer has been successful at every stop (104-12 overall as a head coach).

2. WILLIE FRITZ → HOUSTON — Grade: A+
Previous Job: Tulane Head Coach
Fritz has won at every stop and has extensive ties in Texas.

3. JONATHAN SMITH → MICH. STATE — Grade: A+
Previous Job: Oregon State Head Coach
Smith brings a style that is well suited for the Big Ten.

4. JON SUMRALL → TULANE — Grade: A+
Previous Job: Troy Head Coach
Sumrall was a perfect pick to maintain Tulane's recent rise.

5. CURT CIGNETTI → INDIANA — Grade: A+
Previous Job: James Madison Head Coach
Cignetti has accumulated a 119-35 record as a head coach.

6. MIKE ELKO → TEXAS A&M — Grade: A
Previous Job: Duke Head Coach
Elko spent four years at A&M (2018-21) as DC.

7. SHERRONE MOORE → MICHIGAN — Grade: A
Previous Job: Michigan Offensive Coordinator
Moore's 4-0 stint as interim coach earned him his shot.

8. PETE LEMBO → BUFFALO — Grade: A
Previous Job: South Carolina Special Teams Coach
Lembo had a previous five-year stint in the MAC at Ball State.

9. JEDD FISCH → WASHINGTON — Grade: A
Previous Job: Arizona Head Coach
Fisch delivered significant improvement at Arizona.

10. SEAN LEWIS → SAN DIEGO STATE — Grade: A
Previous Job: Colorado Offensive Coordinator
Lewis is one of the top offensive minds in college football.

11. BOB CHESNEY → JAMES MADISON — Grade: A
Previous Job: Holy Cross Head Coach
Chesney is poised to be the next standout hire for JMU.

12. BRONCO MENDENHALL → NEW MEXICO — Grade: B+
Previous Job: Virginia Head Coach
He's won at tough jobs before (135-81 at BYU and Virginia).

13. BRENT BRENNAN → ARIZONA — Grade: B+
Previous Job: San José State Head Coach
Brennan delivered three bowl trips in the last five years.

14. JEFF CHOATE → NEVADA — Grade: B+
Previous Job: Texas Co-Defensive Coordinator
Choate brings a wealth of experience from high-profile assistant jobs and a stint as Montana State's head coach.

15. BILL O'BRIEN → BOSTON COLLEGE — Grade: B
Previous Job: New England Patriots Offensive Coordinator
Brings ties to the region and a 15-9 mark at Penn State.

16. SCOTTY WALDEN → UTEP — Grade: B
Previous Job: Austin Peay Head Coach
Walden — a native of Texas — is a rising star.

17. JEFF LEBBY → MISS. STATE — Grade: B
Previous Job: Oklahoma Offensive Coordinator
Lebby had a previous stint as the OC at Ole Miss (2020-21).

18. MANNY DIAZ → DUKE — Grade: B-
Previous Job: Penn State Defensive Coordinator
Diaz's defenses at Penn State were among the nation's best.

19. DEREK MASON → MTSU — Grade: B-
Previous Job: Oklahoma State Defensive Coordinator
Mason (27-55 at Vanderbilt) takes a job with lots of upside.

20. DAVID BRAUN → NORTHWESTERN — Grade: B-
Previous Job: Northwestern Interim Head Coach
Braun led the Cats to a stunning 8-5 season in 2023.

21. SPENCER DANIELSON → BOISE STATE — Grade: B-
Previous Job: Boise State Interim Head Coach
His 3-1 stint as interim coach was enough to land him the job.

22. KEN NIUMATALOLO → SAN JOSE STATE — Grade: B-
Previous Job: UCLA Director of Leadership
Niumatalolo went 109-83 as Navy head coach.

23. DELL McGEE → GEORGIA STATE — Grade: B-
Previous Job: Georgia Running Backs Coach
McGee has deep recruiting ties in the Peach State.

24. MAJOR APPLEWHITE → SOUTH ALABAMA — Grade: B-
Previous Job: South Alabama Offensive Coordinator
His offenses have been solid, and he ensures continuity.

25. FRAN BROWN → SYRACUSE — Grade: B-
Previous Job: Georgia Defensive Backs Coach
Brown's recruiting ability is already paying dividends.

26. BRYANT VINCENT → ULM — Grade: B-
Previous Job: New Mexico Offensive Coordinator
Vincent's offensive acumen seems like a good fit for ULM.

27. DESHAUN FOSTER → UCLA — Grade: C
Previous Job: UCLA Running Backs Coach
Foster is a first-time coach who brings needed energy.

28. JAY SAWVEL → WYOMING — Grade: C
Previous Job: Wyoming Defensive Coordinator
Sawvel spent four years as UW defensive coordinator.

29. GERAD PARKER → TROY — Grade: C-
Previous Job: Notre Dame Offensive Coordinator
Parker guided the nation's No. 7 scoring offense.

30. TRENT BRAY → OREGON STATE — Grade: C-
Previous Job: Oregon State Defensive Coordinator
The former Beavers LB knows what it takes to win here.

31. TONY SANCHEZ → N.M. STATE — Grade: C-
Previous Job: New Mexico State Wide Receivers Coach
Promoting Sanchez (an NMSU alum) ensures continuity.

DeBoer: Gary Cosby Jr.-Tuscaloosa News; Smith: Nick King/Lansing State Journal

10 BEST GAMES OF 2024

1. MICHIGAN AT OHIO STATE (NOV. 30) Even with no divisions and a larger College Football Playoff field, The Game will more than likely matter on a national scale. The Buckeyes will certainly be ready for the Wolverines' visit to the Horseshoe. Ohio State hasn't lost four in a row to Michigan in more than 30 years.

2. GEORGIA AT ALABAMA (SEPT. 28) This one may truly mean more this year. Expansion has caused the SEC to ditch divisions, so both teams have to travel the same path to the championship game. Kalen DeBoer also is hoping to maintain the Crimson Tide's dominance over Kirby Smart's Bulldogs. Bama has won five of the past six meetings against UGA.

3. GEORGIA AT TEXAS (OCT. 19) Both the Bulldogs and Longhorns have national title aspirations, and a matchup that usually only happened in December or January will take place in mid-October. Georgia will head to Austin for the first time in nearly 70 years, and don't forget that this is now a conference game.

4. TEXAS AT MICHIGAN (SEPT. 7) This matchup in the Big House will be just the second time these storied programs have ever met. The Longhorns get another opportunity to show that they are back, while everyone will be watching to see how the defending national champions fare after so much coaching and roster turnover.

5. OHIO STATE AT OREGON (OCT. 2) These teams met a few years ago in Columbus in a game that did not disappoint. This time, the Buckeyes will head to Eugene for the first time since 1967 for a matchup made possible by the new-look Big Ten. Autzen Stadium will no doubt have a warm welcome waiting for Chip Kelly, the former Oregon head coach who is now Ohio State's offensive coordinator.

6. CLEMSON AT FLORIDA STATE (OCT. 5) Dabo Swinney and Co. get their shot at the reigning ACC champs in Tallahassee, where they have won three in a row. This could set up a second meeting in Charlotte in December, or it could be the game that knocks the loser out of the title game picture.

7. OREGON AT MICHIGAN (NOV. 2) The Ducks were victorious in their last visit to Ann Arbor, beating the Wolverines in 2007. A lot has changed since, including the fact that these two teams are now in the same conference. So what better way for Oregon to introduce itself to the Big Ten than with a win over the defending national champions in the Big House?

8. TEXAS VS. OKLAHOMA IN DALLAS (OCT. 12) Different conference but still the same historic, heated rivalry. The Sooners have won five of the past six meetings with the Longhorns. An argument can also be made that this game takes on greater importance when it comes to championship aspirations in the rugged SEC compared to the Big 12, where that was the expectation for both teams.

9. GEORGIA AT OLE MISS (NOV. 9) The Bulldogs beat up on the Rebels last season between the hedges, but this time the game is in Oxford. Location hasn't really been much of a factor in this series, however, with UGA winning 11 of the past 12 meetings. History aside, this qualifies as a put-up-or-shut-up game for Lane Kiffin's team.

10. OHIO STATE AT PENN STATE (NOV. 2) The Big Ten's expansion and new division-less setup won't impact this rivalry, at least in 2024. Then again, the Buckeyes have owned the Nittany Lions recently, as they'll come to Happy Valley riding a seven-game winning streak in this series. Amidst the other changes in the conference, is this the year James Franklin gets into the win column against Ryan Day?

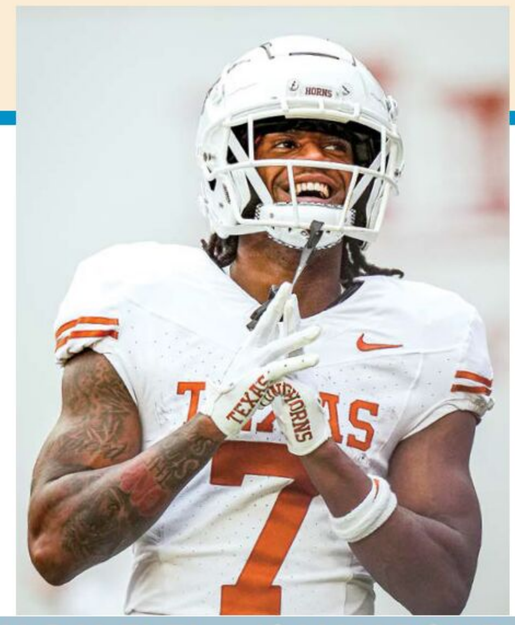
NEXT 10

(in chronological order)

- Georgia vs. Clemson in Atlanta (Aug. 31)
- LSU vs. USC in Las Vegas (Sept. 1)
- Michigan at Washington (Oct. 5)
- Ole Miss at LSU (Oct. 12)
- Missouri at Alabama (Oct. 26)
- Alabama at LSU (Nov. 9)
- Florida State at Notre Dame (Nov. 9)
- Alabama at Oklahoma (Nov. 23)
- Notre Dame at USC (Nov. 30)
- Texas at Texas A&M (Nov. 30)

Adam Cairns/Columbus Dispatch

2024 TOP TRANSFERS



DJ UIAGALELEI → ISAIAH BOND

QB **AIDAN CHILES**
Michigan State ← from Oregon State
Chiles and head coach Jonathan Smith will try to revive an anemic passing attack.

QB **DILLON GABRIEL**
Oregon ← from Oklahoma
In three years at UCF and two at Oklahoma, Gabriel has accounted for nearly 16,000 yards of offense in 50 games.

QB **TAYLEN GREEN**
Arkansas ← from Boise State
Arkansas is hoping Green's dual-threat ability will jump-start an offense that finished near the bottom of the SEC.

QB **WILL HOWARD**
Ohio State ← from Kansas State
Howard threw for 5,786 yards and accounted for 67 total TDs (48 passing, 19 rushing) in four seasons at Kansas State.

QB **KJ JEFFERSON**
UCF ← from Arkansas
Jefferson's size (6-3, 247) and skill set are similar to those of another Gus Malzahn quarterback — Cam Newton.

QB **RILEY LEONARD**
Notre Dame ← from Duke
If he's healthy, his running ability (career 5.3 ypc) could add a new element to Notre Dame's offense.

QB **GRAYSON McCALL**
NC State ← from Coastal Carolina
McCall posted 10,005 passing yards, 88 touchdowns and only 14 interceptions in 42 career games at Coastal.

QB **DJ UIAGALELEI**
Florida State ← from Oregon State
The former Oregon State and Clemson starter will take the reins following the departure of Jordan Travis.

QB **CAM WARD**
Miami ← from Washington State
In two seasons in Pullman, Ward threw for 6,968 yards with 48 TDs and added 13 scores on the ground.

RB **QUINSHON JUDKINS**
Ohio State ← from Ole Miss
The two-time first-team All-SEC performer will pair with TreVeyon Henderson in the No. 1 backfield in the country.

RB **TREVOR ETIENNE**
Florida ← from Georgia
Etienne is joining the other side of this historic rivalry after recording 1,472 rushing yards and 14 TDs at Florida.

RB **DAMIEN MARTINEZ**
TBD ← from Oregon State
Martinez rushed for 1,185 yards last season.

WR **ISAIAH BOND**
Texas ← from Alabama
Bond led Bama last season with 48 catches.

WR **EVAN STEWART**
Oregon ← from Texas A&M
The 5-star recruit had 91 catches in two seasons at A&M.

WR **ANTWANE (JUICE) WELLS JR.**
Ole Miss ← from South Carolina
Injuries limited him in 2023 after an All-SEC campaign in '22.

OL **CAYDEN GREEN**
Missouri ← from Oklahoma
The Missouri native takes over at left tackle for the Tigers.

OL **LANCE HEARD**
Tennessee ← from LSU
Heard could be Nico Iamaleava's blindside protector.

OL **KADYN PROCTOR**
Alabama ← from Iowa
The top OT in the 2023 class, Proctor had transferred to Iowa but returned to Alabama after only three months.

DL **WALTER NOLEN**
Ole Miss ← from Texas A&M
Flashed immense talent (8.5 TFLs, four sacks) last season.

DL **NIC SCOURTON**
Texas A&M ← from Purdue
Scourton was fourth in the Big Ten in TFLs (15) last season.

LB **JAMON DUMAS-JOHNSON**
Kentucky ← from Georgia
Figures to play a critical role in the middle of UK's defense.

LB **TREY MOORE**
Texas ← from UTSA
Moore registered 14 sacks and 17.5 TFLs last season.

CB **JABBAR MUHAMMAD**
Oregon ← from Washington
Tied for second nationally with 19 passes defended in 2023.

S **CALEB DOWNS**
Ohio State ← from Alabama
The SEC Freshman of the Year solidifies a stellar unit.

S **ANDREW MUKUBA**
Texas ← from Clemson
The Austin native started for three years at Clemson.

S **KEON SABB**
Alabama ← from Michigan
A starter in the national championship game for Michigan.

Uiagalelei: Melina Myers-USA TODAY Sports; Bond: Sara Diggins-USA Today Sports via American Statesman

BREAKOUT PLAYERS

JACKSON ARNOLD → NICO IAMALEAVA

→ QB JACKSON ARNOLD, Oklahoma

Arnold is the next star for a program that has produced four Heisman Trophy winners since '03. After working as the backup to Dillon Gabriel as a freshman last year, the Texas native started the Alamo Bowl against Arizona. As expected, Arnold was up and down (26-of-45 for 361 yards and three interceptions) but also flashed the talent that made him one of the nation's top quarterback recruits in '23.

→ QB NICO IAMALEAVA, Tennessee

The former 5-star prospect shined in limited time last season. Against a standout Iowa defense in the Vols' bowl win, Iamaleava flashed the potential that makes his reported $8 million NIL deal worth every penny, throwing for 151 yards and scoring three times on the ground.

→ QB AVERY JOHNSON, Kansas State

Johnson wasted no time making an impact as a true freshman. Despite having a proven quarterback in Will Howard, the coaching staff found ways to get Johnson involved in a change-of-pace role. In his first career start, Johnson earned Pop-Tarts Bowl MVP honors with 249 total yards.

→ QB GARRETT NUSSMEIER, LSU

Heisman Trophy winner Jayden Daniels, coordinator Mike Denbrock and receivers Brian Thomas and Malik Nabers departed after guiding LSU to the nation's No. 1 scoring offense last season. However, Nussmeier has shined in limited time.

→ RB JUSTICE HAYNES, Alabama

Haynes made a strong impression last offseason but was limited to just 25 carries as the No. 3 back behind Jase McClellan and Roydell Williams. With McClellan and Williams no longer on the roster, Haynes is primed to turn potential into production. The son of former Georgia standout Verron Haynes ran for 168 yards on 25 carries last year.

→ WR ZACHARIAH BRANCH, USC

Branch already has flashed his talent on special teams by taking two returns back for touchdowns last season. Head coach Lincoln Riley should get the dynamic sophomore more involved on offense this year.

→ WR DEVIN McCUIN, UTSA

The Roadrunners lost two key receivers from a prolific 2023 offense, opening the door for McCuin to become the No. 1 target this fall. McCuin grabbed 42 passes for 546 yards and three scores as a true freshman last year.

→ WR JEREMIAH SMITH, Ohio State

Living up to the hype as a true freshman is never easy, but Smith is on track to become one of the Big Ten's top receivers. The Florida native's highlight-reel catches were the talk of spring practice in Columbus.

→ OL FRANCIS MAUIGOA, Miami

Mauigoa started all 13 games at right tackle for the Hurricanes as a true freshman and garnered All-ACC honorable mention honors for his standout debut. Miami's offensive line will be among the best in the ACC.

→ DL MARVIN JONES JR., Florida State

Help in the trenches for the Noles is coming in the form of a legacy transfer. Jones Jr. — the son of former Florida State star linebacker Marvin Jones — played in 25 games at Georgia and recorded 5.5 tackles for a loss.

→ DL T.J. PARKER, Clemson

Clemson lost all four starters from last year's defensive front, but coordinator Wes Goodwin has a couple of rising stars ready to emerge. Parker is one after a standout true freshman campaign in 2023. The Alabama native finished second on the team with 12.5 tackles for a loss and 5.5 sacks.

→ LB C.J. ALLEN, Georgia

An injury to Jamon Dumas-Johnson in early November opened the door for Allen to see increased playing time in Georgia's final five contests. All the true freshman did was emerge as the next star for coach Kirby Smart's defense, recording 29 tackles in that stretch.

→ LB ANTHONY HILL, Texas

Hill wasn't a full-time starter in his first season in Austin, but he played in all 14 games, recording 67 tackles and one forced fumble. Hill created havoc around the line of scrimmage with eight tackles for a loss and five sacks.

→ LB TONY ROJAS, Penn State

Linebacker U needs reinforcements with Abdul Carter moving to defensive end and Curtis Jacobs off to the NFL. The Nittany Lions won't have to look far, as Rojas recorded 22 tackles (3.5 for a loss) in 13 appearances last season.

→ DB XAVIER NWANKPA, Iowa

Even with All-American Cooper DeJean off to the NFL, the Hawkeyes are positioned to have one of the nation's top secondaries once again. Nwankpa played in all 14 contests and recorded one interception and two pass breakups in 2023.

Arnold: Sarah Phipps/The Oklahoman; Iamaleava: Saul Young/News Sentinel;

15 THINGS TO WATCH IN 2024

BY STEVEN LASSAN, ATHLON COLLEGE FOOTBALL EDITOR

2025 NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

1. THE 12-TEAM CFB PLAYOFF ARRIVES

For the first time in the history of the sport, college football will have a full-blown playoff in 2024. The path to the 12-team event was filled with small steps forward — from the College Football Bowl Coalition in the 1990s to the invention of the BCS and later the four-team playoff. However, for a variety of reasons including realignment and expansion, the process of getting to 12 teams wasn't smooth or harmonious among the conference commissioners. After an initial proposal was discussed in 2021, the official format for this season and '25 wasn't approved until February.

The format for the next two years includes 12 teams, with five spots going to the highest-rated conference champions and seven to top at-large teams as determined by the CFB Playoff Selection Committee. The top four conference champions will receive byes, and teams seeded No. 5-8 will host a home game in the first round. Following the first round, all playoff contests will be played at bowl or neutral sites.

The seismic shift in postseason play creates new opportunities for teams that have yet to make an appearance in the four-team version. Only 15 different teams made the previous format, but this setup is expected to add value to more late-season contests and allow '24 preseason top-15 teams like Missouri, Penn State, Ole Miss, Utah and Tennessee an opportunity to make their first appearance. Also, a Group of 5 team will make the playoff every year, giving programs like Liberty, Appalachian State, Boise State, Tulane and UTSA a fair postseason shot.

2. TEXAS AND OKLAHOMA JOIN THE SEC

It really does mean more in the SEC with the additions of Texas and Oklahoma. College football's top conference not only added programs with national titles in the modern era and likely annual CFB Playoff contenders, but both the Sooners and Longhorns also fit perfectly within the SEC footprint. And thanks to the geographic fit, old rivalries lost due to conference realignment like Texas A&M-Texas, Oklahoma-Missouri and Texas-Arkansas are renewed.

The Longhorns are positioned for more success in their SEC debut after making the playoff last season. Quarterback Quinn Ewers and a revamped set of receivers will team with one of the nation's top offensive lines to form a dynamic attack. There are holes to fill on defense, but Texas has time to reload on that side of the ball before Georgia visits Austin on Oct. 19.

The success of Texas in '23 overshadowed Oklahoma's improvement, jumping from 6-7 in 2022 to 10-3 last season. The Sooners enter the SEC with bigger concerns than their rival, as coach Brent Venables must replace all five starters on the offensive line and continue to improve a defense that allowed 26.6 points per game in Big 12 contests last year.

3. TRANSFERS LEAD THE WAY FOR NOTRE DAME

The upcoming season is a crucial one for head coach Marcus Freeman's tenure at Notre Dame. Through two years, his Fighting Irish are 19-8 and have yet to finish higher than No. 14 in the final Associated Press Top 25. That pace is slightly better than previous coach Brian Kelly (16-11 in his first two years), but Notre Dame hasn't been much of a factor in the CFB Playoff race of late.

However, the expanded playoff provides a favorable path to a postseason spot, and Freeman made a couple of offseason moves in hopes of upgrading this program. Notre Dame dipped into the portal for the second year in a row and the third time in four seasons to find a starter at quarterback, landing former Duke signal-caller Riley Leonard. Freeman also boosted an inconsistent group of receivers by adding three names from the portal, including former FIU standout Kris Mitchell.

The transfer additions are crucial, but Freeman's biggest move was to lure former coordinator Mike Denbrock back to South Bend after directing the nation's No. 1 scoring offense at LSU last season.

Notre Dame's defense should rank among the best in the nation with five starters back, including All-America candidates in lineman Howard Cross III and safety Xavier Watts. If the key transfer additions and Denbrock's hire hit as expected, a favorable schedule gives Freeman a path to a breakout in his third season at the helm.

From top: Sara Diggins/American-Statesman; Kevin Jairaj-USA TODAY Sports

4. MICHIGAN VS. OHIO STATE

Tensions between rivals Ohio State and Michigan reached a fever pitch in 2023 with the sign-stealing investigation into the Wolverines' program. But even with former Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh off to the NFL, the cold war between the Wolverines and Buckeyes isn't going to thaw anytime soon.

New Michigan coach Sherrone Moore already proved capable of filling Harbaugh's shoes with an impressive 4-0 stint last season that included a win over Ohio State. But Moore will have his hands full with a revamped roster. The Wolverines return only five starters, lost the entire offensive line and exited the spring with uncertainty at quarterback.

Three consecutive losses to Michigan aren't sitting well in Columbus. Although head coach Ryan Day isn't on the hot seat, the pressure is building. The urgency to get Ohio State back on top of the Big Ten manifested into several changes.

The Buckeyes reportedly spent $10 million in NIL money to recruit and maintain the roster, which included the arrival of two impact transfers in Alabama safety Caleb Downs and Ole Miss running back Quinshon Judkins. Another portal addition (Kansas State's Will Howard) could start at quarterback. Day also tweaked his staff, hiring UCLA head coach Chip Kelly as offensive coordinator and promoting former Ohio State standout James Laurinaitis to linebackers coach.

Will Ohio State's changes pay off? Or will Michigan continue its recent dominance? The Nov. 30 showdown in Columbus looms large for both programs.

5. BIG TEN GOES WEST

After the SEC expanded to 16 with Oklahoma and Texas, the Big Ten had only one possible move in response: Go West.

After adding Oregon, UCLA, USC and Washington, the Big Ten footprint now extends from coast to coast and brought in four programs capable of contending for spots to the CFB Playoff on a regular basis.

Of the four newcomers, the Ducks are positioned the best for success in '24. Oregon's high-powered offense won't miss a beat with Oklahoma transfer Dillon Gabriel replacing Bo Nix at quarterback. Head coach Dan Lanning's squad also has a marquee showdown against Ohio State in Eugene on Oct. 12.

Repeating last year's run to the national championship game is a tall task for Washington. The Huskies have to adapt to a new coach (Jedd Fisch) with only two starters back.

Transition is also the key offseason storyline in Los Angeles. Former UCLA running back DeShaun Foster takes over the Bruins after Chip Kelly left to be the offensive coordinator at Ohio State. Crosstown rival USC has only seven starters back, and head coach Lincoln Riley took a major swing at improving the team's lagging defense by hiring D'Anton Lynn from UCLA as coordinator.

6. GEORGIA BACK ON TOP?

An old nemesis of Georgia and head coach Kirby Smart (Alabama) ended the Bulldogs' hopes of a national championship three-peat last season in an SEC Championship Game upset. Smart's team promptly took out its frustrations on shorthanded Florida State in a 63-3 Orange Bowl rout.

The expanded playoff adds more roadblocks and variables to any team's quest for a title, but Georgia is equipped for the challenge thanks to the nation's deepest roster. Quarterback Carson Beck returns after an impressive debut and has a strong supporting cast in place to elevate an offense that averaged 40.1 points per game last year. The defense led the SEC in fewest points allowed (15.6 per game), and it returns six starters.

Georgia's '24 schedule could be its toughest obstacle. The opener against Clemson in Atlanta is a chance for Smart's team to make an early statement. The Bulldogs will play at Alabama, Texas, and Ole Miss — three projected top-10 teams by Athlon Sports — this fall. If Georgia stumbles, that trio is poised to benefit.

7. TRANSFERS DOMINATE THE STARTING QB RANKS

Finding a new starting quarterback has never been easier thanks to the portal and new unlimited transfer rules. With the right fit under center, teams can supercharge a turnaround in just one offseason. Just how important are transfer QBs this season? More than 200 signal-callers entered the portal this offseason, and nearly 60 percent of college football teams are likely to start a transfer.

Some of the names on the move for a third time include high-profile QBs like Dillon Gabriel (Oklahoma to Oregon), Cameron Ward (Washington State to Miami) and DJ Uiagalelei (Oregon State to Florida State).

Rising stars like Aidan Chiles (Oregon State to Michigan State), Maalik Murphy (Texas to Duke), and Brock Vandagriff (Georgia to Kentucky) are also on the move, while projected top-10 teams in Notre Dame (Riley Leonard) and Ohio State (Will Howard) are expected to rely on transfers to lead their offense.

From top: Adam Cairns/Columbus Dispatch; Sam Navarro-USA TODAY Sports

15 THINGS TO WATCH IN 2024

8. COACH PRIME'S SECOND YEAR AT COLORADO

As expected, nothing was conventional about Coach Prime's first FBS season. Deion Sanders' Buffaloes provided an interesting look behind the curtain with clips on social media, including a first meeting where Sanders indicated "Louis Luggage" was on its way from the portal to completely overturn a roster that featured more than 70 new players.

While Colorado's early optimism faded with a 4-8 finish, there was tangible progress in Boulder. After a 1-11 record and being outscored 534 to 185 (-349) in '23, the Buffaloes improved their win total by three games and lowered the scoring deficit to minus-80.

Although the Buffaloes are more nationally relevant, the '24 season is critical to show that the program has actual staying power and can take another step forward as it moves to the Big 12. To his credit, Sanders didn't sit pat this offseason. The bulk of the coaching staff was overturned, and there are new play-callers on both sides of the ball.

The roster is also set to look a lot different. More than 30 transfers are headed to Boulder, including reinforcements up front to boost a line that allowed 56 sacks last year. On paper, the talent level has improved. And with two of the nation's top players — quarterback Shedeur Sanders and defensive back/receiver Travis Hunter — returning, Colorado will once again be under the spotlight as arguably the most interesting team in the nation. But this time, the Buffaloes could produce their first winning record in a full season since 2016.

9. BOBBY PETRINO RIDES AGAIN

After Petrino's tenure as the Arkansas head coach ended following a motorcycle crash that later turned into a scandal in 2012, the odds of him returning to work for the Razorbacks seemed set on zero.

But college football coaches can make interesting decisions when faced with desperation. That's exactly the scenario Arkansas coach Sam Pittman faces after a 4-8 season in '23 that placed him squarely on the hot seat.

With the Razorbacks needing to drastically improve an offense that managed only 4.5 yards per play in SEC games, Pittman turned to Petrino to handle play-calling duties in Fayetteville once again.

Petrino clearly didn't lose his touch in the SEC after leading Texas A&M to an average of 33.3 points a game, and the early returns in the spring were positive with Boise State transfer Taylen Green at quarterback.

Can Petrino write a redemption story and help Pittman save his job? Or will this tenure for Petrino end like almost all of the other spots in his career: in disappointment or chaos?

10. ADDED INTRIGUE IN THE GROUP OF 5

One team in the Group of 5 ranks is guaranteed a trip to the 12-team College Football Playoff. But who will it be?

Liberty — the top Group of 5 team last season — starts at the top of the list of contenders. Quarterback Kaidon Salter returns to pilot a high-powered offense, and an early road test at Sun Belt favorite Appalachian State looms large for playoff positioning. Several teams in the Sun Belt are dealing with major transition, which leaves the Mountaineers (East Division champion in '23) as the odds-on favorite in that conference.

SMU's departure to the ACC likely means a wide-open race atop the American Athletic Conference in '24. Quarterback Seth Henigan leads a dynamic Memphis offense coming off a 10-win season, but South Florida, Tulane and UTSA will push the Tigers.

Boise State is the favorite to repeat in the Mountain West. Running back Ashton Jeanty powers a punishing ground game, and USC transfer QB Malachi Nelson is an intriguing addition. UNLV, Fresno State, Air Force and Colorado State could push the Broncos.

Defending champion Miami (Ohio) leads the way in the MAC once again, but Toledo is a team to watch if head coach Jason Candle's squad quickly reloads on offense after losing quarterback Dequan Finn to transfer (Baylor).

11. WIDE OPEN IN THE NEW BIG 12

Entertaining chaos (in a good way) might be the best way to describe the new 16-team Big 12. The conference lost premier programs Texas and Oklahoma to the SEC but added four teams — Arizona, Arizona State, Colorado, and Utah — to form a quality league with little separation from top to bottom

With parity likely to rule in '24 and beyond, the Big 12 could be the most entertaining conference on a week-to-week basis. Look no further than this fall, as Kansas State, Oklahoma State, Utah, Kansas and Arizona all have a legitimate argument to be the preseason favorite. West Virginia and Iowa State might be a step behind, but the Mountaineers and Cyclones aren't too far off.

Beyond the top tier are a host of intriguing teams. Can TCU rebound after a disappointing 5-7 season? Texas Tech suffered a couple of close losses in '23 and returns quarterback Behren Morton and running back Tahj Brooks to provide optimism for a quick rebound. UCF was the best of last year's four newcomers to the conference and landed one of the nation's top impact transfer quarterbacks in KJ Jefferson (Arkansas).

And if that wasn't enough intrigue in the Big 12, there's still Colorado under Deion Sanders and promising coaches at Arizona State (Kenny Dillingham) and Houston (Willie Fritz).

Ron Chenoy-USA TODAY Sports;

12. A WILD-CARD CONTENDER IN THE ACC?

After they've combined for 12 out of the last 13 ACC titles, it's no surprise the list of favorites in a year filled with uncertainty starts with Clemson and Florida State.

Even with several key players departing from Florida State's 13-1 squad, a loaded class of transfers and the motivation from a CFB Playoff snub should have this team back in the mix to win it all. The Tigers hope another offseason under offensive coordinator Garrett Riley will aid the development of quarterback Cade Klubnik.

While Florida State and Clemson are default favorites, neither should feel secure. Jeff Brohm guided Louisville to the ACC Championship Game and reeled in a top transfer class. ACC newcomer SMU arrives with 14 returning starters off a team that won 11 games. The arrivals of quarterback Cam Ward (Washington State) and running back Damien Martinez (Oregon State) give Miami head coach Mario Cristobal's team enough weaponry to play for an ACC title for the first time since '17. Virginia Tech won five out of its last seven games and is a team on the rise with 19 starters back. NC State has won at least eight games in each of the last four seasons and has Coastal Carolina transfer Grayson McCall taking the reins on offense.

Florida State and Clemson are the odds-on favorites to play for the ACC championship. But with the turnover at both, combined with a lengthy list of contenders, the race to win the conference crown could produce a surprise.

13. NEBRASKA TRENDING UP UNDER MATT RHULE

Nebraska's overall win total (5-7) in coach Matt Rhule's debut was only one game better than the previous year. However, a closer look at the 2023 season showed signs of progress. Five of the losses came by one score, including a three-point defeat to Big Ten West Division champion Iowa. The defense improved to fifth in the conference in fewest points allowed under new coordinator Tony White after ranking 11th the previous year. This group held eight opponents under 100 rushing yards.

Rhule's biggest victory came on the recruiting trail. Five-star quarterback prospect Dylan Raiola was a huge get at a position of need and a boost to Rhule's turnaround efforts.

Nebraska has struggled to do the small things right with close losses and turnover problems (minus-17 differential in '23), but there's a feeling this program has turned a corner and found an identity under Rhule. At Temple, Rhule's second team improved its win total by four games. And at Baylor, he guided the program to a six-win jump in Year 2.

With seven starters back, the defense should remain near the top of the Big Ten and anchor the team as Raiola grows into the QB position. Although the Cornhuskers aren't going to contend for a national title anytime soon, there are signs Rhule's process will produce tangible on-field progress in '24.

14. OLE MISS LEADS NEW ERA OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL

No team illustrates the new era of college football better than Ole Miss. Under head coach Lane Kiffin and with help from The Grove Collective — an NIL program with plans to raise $10 million in '24 — the Rebels brought in one of the nation's top portal hauls, and 16 of the 22 projected starters are transfers.

The incoming group of newcomers included several impact defenders, including linemen Walter Nolen (Texas A&M) and Princely Umanmielen (Florida). Defensive improvement is the missing piece for a team coming off an 11-win season and already possessing one of the nation's top offenses.

The combination of deploying NIL resources to lure talent and using the portal to fill holes opens the door for programs like Ole Miss to rapidly boost the roster in an effort to go all-in on a season and reach the expanded playoff.

But the Rebels aren't the only one using this strategy. Miami's Canes Connection NIL program was instrumental in its roster building this offseason; Florida State's Battle's End collective allowed head coach Mike Norvell to reload a roster with just eight returning starters; and Texas Aggies United helped new head coach Mike Elko bring in one of the nation's top transfer hauls. Ohio State also reportedly spent between $10 million and $13 million to retain top players considering the NFL Draft and add through the portal or freshman class.

15. 31 NEW COACHES IN 2024

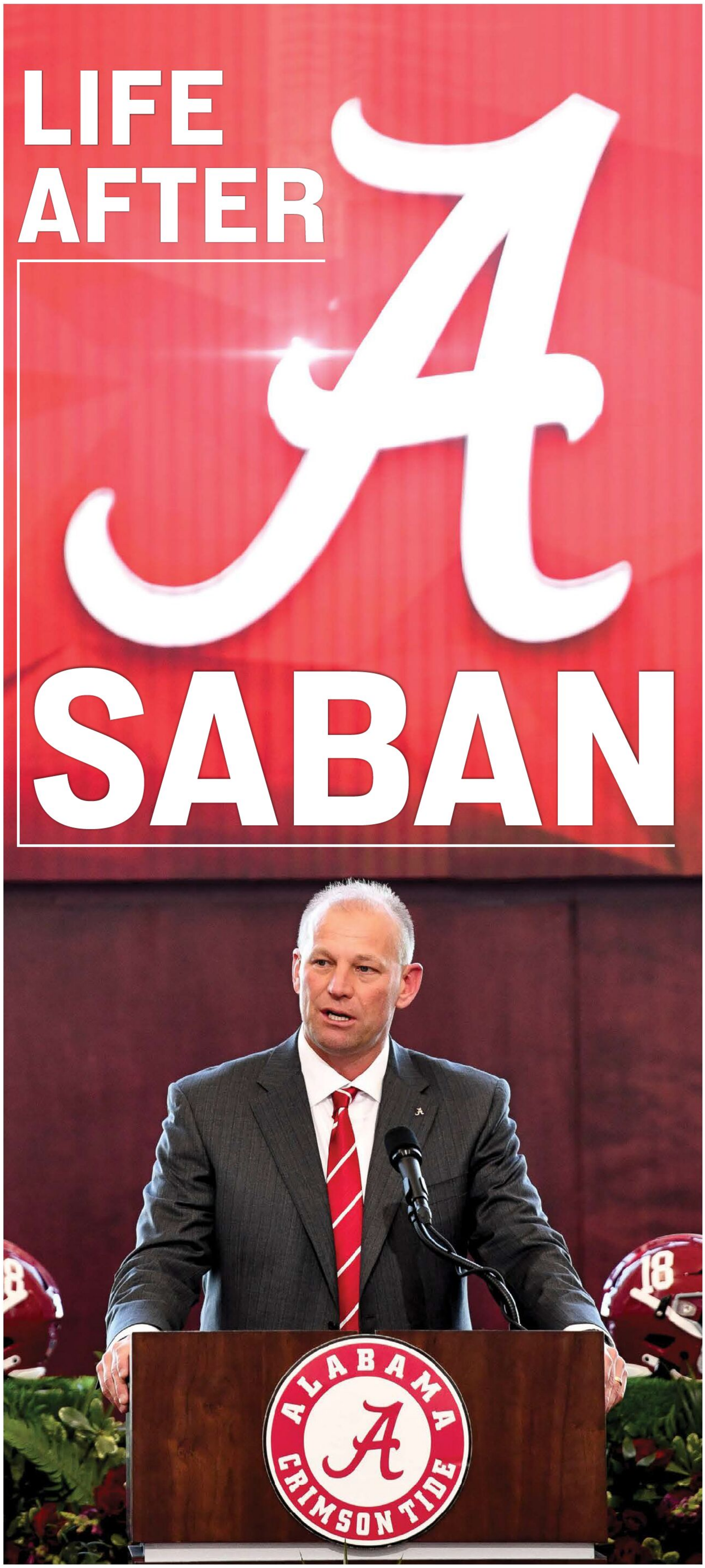
Job security is something most college football coaches won't find in this era. Of the 134 coaches in charge for '24, 78 were hired at their current jobs since '22. And the carousel spun at a dizzying pace after last season, when 31 jobs changed hands, including three hires in February.

The changes ranged from new faces at high-profile jobs like Kalen DeBoer replacing Nick Saban at Alabama and Sherrone Moore promoted from offensive coordinator at Michigan when Jim Harbaugh left to take over the Los Angeles Chargers.

Rising stars Jonathan Smith (Michigan State), Bob Chesney (James Madison), Sean Lewis (San Diego State), Jedd Fisch (Washington) and Mike Elko (Texas A&M) landed at new places, with coaching veterans like Willie Fritz (Houston) and Curt Cignetti (Indiana) moving up to power-conference jobs.

This cycle also brought back a few old faces, including Bronco Mendenhall (New Mexico), Manny Diaz (Duke), Derek Mason (Middle Tennessee), Bill O'Brien (Boston College) and Ken Niumatalolo (San Jose State). And two interim coaches — David Braun (Northwestern) and Spencer Danielson (Boise State) — were promoted to the full-time role.

With rosters more unsettled than ever, an expanded playoff and 23 percent of teams changing coaches, one thing seems certain: College football is primed for an unpredictable '24 season.



KALEN DEBOER

is merely being asked to do the impossible: fill the unfillable shoes of his legendary predecessor

BY ALEX KIRSHNER

Did Kalen DeBoer take the easiest job in college football or the hardest one?

A few decades ago, taking over a dynasty would've been a plum gig: When Larry Coker became head coach at Miami in 2001, he inherited a roster with Ed Reed, Sean Taylor, Andre Johnson, Willis McGahee, Frank Gore, Clinton Portis and Vince Wilfork. There was no transfer portal for Corker to navigate, and he cruised to a 12-0 record and a national championship in his first season.

DeBoer, who succeeds Nick Saban at Alabama this year, must be jealous. He will not only follow a legend who won six national titles in 17 years in Tuscaloosa, but he will also do it at a time when continuity is hard to build. Many of Alabama's most prominent stars hit the portal soon after DeBoer, who was fresh off a national championship game appearance in his second season at Washington, took the job on Jan. 12. The roster that DeBoer will lead onto the field in the fall will not look like the one Saban led into the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day.

From DeBoer's perspective, following Saban is a challenge worth embracing, one made easier by Saban's 17 seasons of work in building the Crimson Tide into a juggernaut. Inheriting a ready-made contender was not necessarily the draw, though. When a reporter asked DeBoer after his introductory press conference why he wanted to follow Saban, the

Gary Cosby Jr.-Tuscaloosa News

answer was telling. "First of all, it was to be the head coach that was here at Alabama, but also understanding that if that was gonna happen, you're gonna have to be the coach to follow Coach Saban," he said. "I don't take that lightly. I take that as quite an honor, to be honest with you."

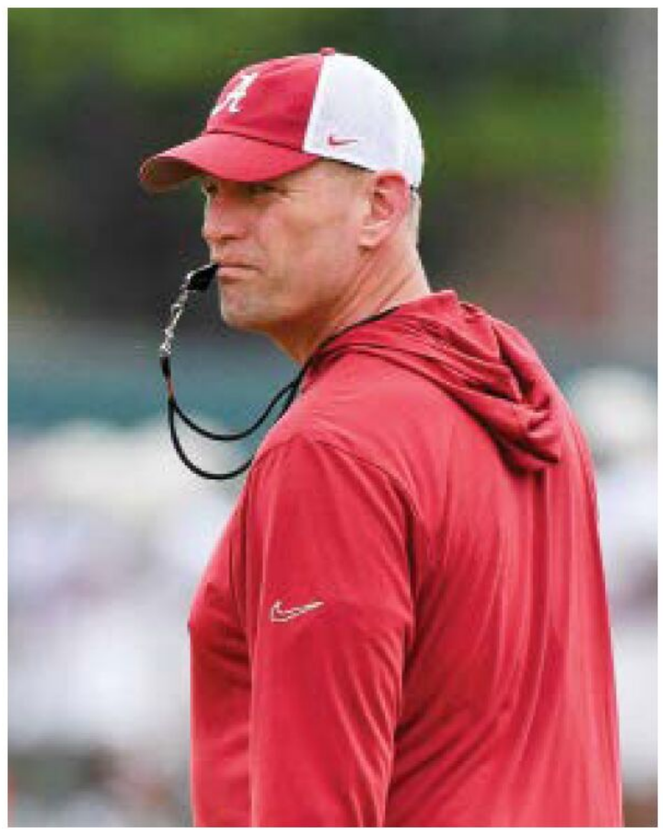
Now, the upkeep of Saban's machine falls to the 49-year old DeBoer, who has a sparkling 104-12 head-coaching record in nine seasons at NAIA Sioux Falls, Fresno State and Washington, where he went 25-3 in two seasons. That record, while impressive, does not answer the most important question: whether DeBoer has the right stuff to take the baton from the most accomplished college football coach who ever lived. How much of what Saban built will prove to be transferable to a new regime? Will Alabama again be the attractive destination for assistants that it was under Saban? Will DeBoer's lack of Southeastern Conference experience be an impediment? And — maybe most important — what are Alabama's expectations in the wake of the most successful run in modern college football history? Whether DeBoer succeeds in the eyes of Alabama fans and powerbrokers rests on a definition of "success" that has no consensus.

Saban did leave DeBoer with some goodies. During Saban's reign, Alabama put unprecedented financial heft into its football program. The Tide became the SEC's biggest spenders on the sport, pouring dollars into everything from coaching salaries to facility upgrades to nutrition.

Those advantages will remain, at least for a while, and they will help DeBoer in both recruiting and player development.

The short-term roster situation will be difficult, though. Quarterback Jalen Milroe stuck around, but most of Alabama's other big names did not. All-America safety Caleb Downs and tackle Kadyn Proctor were among the high-profile exits. Bond went to Texas, and Downs to Ohio State, where 5-star QB Julian Sayin, a former Alabama signee, will join him.

To maintain the Alabama standard in 2024, DeBoer will need help from a new coaching staff that has already seen significant turnover. Ryan Grubb, the offensive coordinator with DeBoer at his prior head-coaching stops, left after only a few days at Alabama to take the same job with the Seattle Seahawks. Offensive line coach Scott Huff, a key cog in DeBoer's quick rebuild of Washington, had a cup of coffee in Tuscaloosa before following Grubb to Seattle.



"When I look at places that I want to be, it's about winning championships. That's an expectation that I ... accept as a privilege to try to uphold — winning SEC championships, winning national championships."

— Kalen DeBoer

Saban lost plenty of assistants, too, but he had the benefit of his stature as the top coach in the country. DeBoer does not have that reputation yet, and he'll have to earn it in the crucible of the SEC. The conference's recruiting battles are notorious for backstabbing ruthlessness and the big-dollar figures that name, image and likeness "collectives" are investing in modern roster-building. DeBoer will need help from Alabama's donors, and he'll need to match the intense energy that Bama's rivals bring to the trail. DeBoer sees the SEC as "best of the best" and Alabama as a unique bastion of tradition within it: "When it comes to tradition and the history of the program. It's second to none," he says. "When I look at places that I want to be, it's about winning championships. That's an expectation that I … accept as a privilege to try to uphold — winning SEC championships, winning national championships."

That Alabama's new head man knows football is obvious to anyone who watched his teams at Washington or Fresno State the past few years. Whether he can recruit in the SEC is still an unanswered question, though, and the answer will say more about Alabama's chances than DeBoer's schematic chops. The commitment of 5-star wide receiver Ryan Williams during February's signing period gave DeBoer some momentum and lifted the spirits of an anxious fan base. Williams, a top-10 national recruit, is the sort of prospect Saban signed early and often after he got to Alabama.

Since Bear Bryant returned to his alma mater in 1958, Alabama has had either Bryant or Saban in charge for 42 seasons. Those years brought 12 national championships. In the 17 other years in that span, the Tide have had seven coaches. Only one of them, Gene Stallings in 1992, claimed a title. Another one, Mike Price in 2002, did not coach a single game before an off-field scandal led to his dismissal. Bama history says that DeBoer will either be a Hall of Fame coach or will find himself devoured whole.

It's not clear how many wins would be enough for DeBoer to earn his predecessor's universal backing, but one thing is certain: The honeymoon will be brief. A big step backward in 2024 likely wouldn't signal a one-and-done tenure, but exactly how much patience DeBoer will be extended is a subject of widespread industry debate.

Saban left Alabama with trophies in the football building, money in the bank and a daunting set of expectations for the next man up. DeBoer has won everywhere he has coached, but at Alabama, his job is not simply to win games. It is to metaphorically tame college football's biggest and most demanding elephant.

Gary Cosby Jr.-Tuscaloosa News

ACC PREVIEW

Xavier Restrepo, WR, Miami

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1	FLORIDA STATE	SEMINOLES
2	CLEMSON	TIGERS
3	MIAMI	HURRICANES
4	LOUISVILLE	CARDINALS
5	NC STATE	WOLFPACK
6	VIRGINIA TECH	HOKIES
7	SMU	MUSTANGS
8	NORTH CAROLINA	TAR HEELS
9	GEORGIA TECH	YELLOW JACKETS
10	CALIFORNIA	GOLDEN BEARS
11	SYRACUSE	ORANGE
12	BOSTON COLLEGE	EAGLES
13	PITT	PANTHERS
14	DUKE	BLUE DEVILS
15	WAKE FOREST	DEMON DEACONS
16	VIRGINIA	CAVALIERS
17	STANFORD	CARDINAL

ACC CHAMPIONSHIP

FLORIDA STATE OVER CLEMSON

Brian Fluharty-USA TODAY Sports

ALL ACC-TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	**Cam Ward**	Miami
RB	**Omarion Hampton**	North Carolina
RB	**Damien Martinez**	Miami
AP	**Jaydn Ott**	California
WR	**Xavier Restrepo**	Miami
WR	**Kevin Concepcion**	NC State
WR	**Caullin Lacy**	Louisville
TE	**Oronde Gadsden II**	Syracuse
C	**Maurice Smith**	Florida State
OL	**Darius Washington**	Florida State
OL	**Jalen Rivers**	Miami
OL	**Ozzy Trapilo**	Boston College
OL	**Blake Miller**	Clemson

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	**Patrick Payton**	Florida State
DL	**Ashton Gillotte**	Louisville
DL	**Antwaun Powell-Ryland**	Virginia Tech
DL	**Rueben Bain**	Miami
LB	**Kaimon Rucker**	North Carolina
LB	**Barrett Carter**	Clemson
LB	**Francisco Mauigoa**	Miami
LB	**Marlowe Wax**	Syracuse
CB	**Aydan White**	NC State
CB	**Quincy Riley**	Louisville
S	**Jonas Sanker**	Virginia
S	**Shyheim Brown**	Florida State

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	**Andres Borregales**	Miami
P	**Alex Mastromanno**	Florida State
KR	**Brashard Smith**	SMU
PR	**Tucker Holloway**	Virginia Tech

For second- and third-team selections, visit athlonsports.com

Bob Self/Florida Times-Union

Barrett Carter, LB, Clemson

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Duke's Mayo: Louisville vs. Rutgers

Fenway: Georgia Tech vs. South Florida

First Responder: Boston College vs. TCU

Gasparilla: SMU vs. Florida

Gator: Miami (Fla.) vs. LSU

Holiday: Virginia Tech vs. Washington

LA Bowl: California vs. Boise State

Military: Syracuse vs. East Carolina

Pinstripe: NC State vs. Maryland

Pop-Tarts: Clemson vs. Oklahoma State

Sun: North Carolina vs. Colorado

Peach Bowl (CFP Quarterfinals): Florida State vs. Texas

ACC PREVIEW

Manny Diaz, Duke

Fran Brown, Syracuse

COACHING CAROUSEL

BOSTON COLLEGE
Head Coach: New: Bill O'Brien; Old: Jeff Hafley
Offense: New: Will Lawing; Old: Steven Shimko, Rob Chudzinski
Defense: New: Tim Lewis; Old: Aazaar Abdul-Rahim, Sean Duggan

CALIFORNIA
Offense: New: Mike Bloesch; Old: Jake Spavital

DUKE
Head Coach: New: Manny Diaz; Old: Mike Elko
Offense: New: Jonathan Brewer; Old: Kevin Johns
Defense: New: Jonathan Patke; Old: Tyler Santucci

GEORGIA TECH
Defense: New: Tyler Santucci; Old: Andrew Thacker, Kevin Sherrer

MIAMI
Defense: New: Lance Guidry, Derek Nicholson: Old: Lance Guidry

NORTH CAROLINA
Defense: New: Geoff Collins, Tommy Thigpen: Old: Gene Chizik

PITT
Offense: New: Kade Bell; Old: Frank Cignetti Jr.

SMU
Offense: New: Casey Woods, Rob Likens: Old: Casey Woods, Jonathan Brewer
Defense: New: Maurice Crum Jr., Scott Symons: Old: Scott Symons

SYRACUSE
Head Coach: New: Fran Brown; Old: Dino Babers
Offense: New: Jeff Nixon, Michael Johnson; Old: Jason Beck
Defense: New: Elijah Robinson, Robert Wright; Old: Rocky Long

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Marquise Lightfoot	Edge	Miami	★★★★★	10
2.	Justin Scott	DL	Miami	★★★★★	11
3.	TJ Moore	WR	Clemson	★★★★★	13
4.	Sammy Brown	LB	Clemson	★★★★★	19
5.	Jordan Lyle	RB	Miami	★★★★	37
6.	Armondo Blount	DL	Miami	★★★★	45
7.	Terrell Anderson	WR	NC State	★★★★	51
8.	Corian Gipson	CB	Clemson	★★★★	54
9.	Jamari Howard	CB	FSU	★★★★	60
10.	Joshisa Trader	WR	Miami	★★★★	68

Diaz: Rodd Baxley/The Fayetteville Observer; Brown: Rich Barnes-USA TODAY Sports

Omarion Hampton, RB, North Carolina

Caullin Lacy, WR, Louisville

ACC RETURNING LEADERS

PASSING	ATT	COMP	PCT	YDS	TD	INT	AVG/G
Cam Ward*, Wash. State	438	292	66.7	3,415	22	5	310.5
Preston Stone, SMU	344	206	59.9	3,197	28	6	266.4
Kyle McCord*, Ohio State	348	229	65.8	3,170	24	6	264.2

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Omarion Hampton, N. Carolina	253	1,504	5.9	15	68	115.7
Jaydn Ott, California	244	1,302	5.3	12	66	108.5
Damien Martinez*, Oregon St.	194	1,185	6.1	9	64	98.8

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Caullin Lacy*, South Alabama	91	1,316	14.5	7	84	109.7
Elic Ayomanor, Stanford	62	1,013	16.3	6	97	84.4
Xavier Restrepo, Miami	85	1,092	12.8	6	48	84.0

Marlowe Wax, LB, Syracuse

DEFENSE

TACKLES
Marlowe Wax, Syracuse (110);
Jonas Sanker, Virginia (107)

SACKS
Ashton Gillotte, Louisville (11.0);
Elijah Roberts, SMU (10.0)

INTERCEPTIONS
Devin Neal, Louisville (4);
Isaiah Nwokobia, SMU (4)

**Ward transferred to Miami in the offseason; *McCord transferred to Syracuse in the offseason; *Martinez transferred to Miami in the offseason; *Lacy transferred to Louisville in the offseason;*

Hampton: Bob Donnan-USA TODAY Sports; Lacy: Scott Utterback/Courier Journal; Wax: Rich Barnes-USA TODAY Sports

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Miami (Fla.) (5)
2. Florida State (12)
3. Clemson (14)
4. North Carolina (27)
5. NC State (29)
6. Virginia Tech (32)
7. Georgia Tech (35)
8. Stanford (36)
9. Syracuse (38)
10. Pittsburgh (45)
11. Wake Forest (53)
12. Louisville (55)
13. California (56)
14. Duke (60)
15. Virginia (78)
16. Boston College (86)
17. SMU (99)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

AUG. 31
Miami at Florida

SEPT. 21
NC State at Clemson

SEPT. 27
Virginia Tech at Miami

SEPT. 28
Florida State at SMU

OCT. 5
Clemson at Florida State

OCT. 19
Miami at Louisville

OCT. 26
Florida State at Miami

NOV. 2
Louisville at Clemson

NOV. 9
Clemson at Virginia Tech

NOV. 9
Florida State at Notre Dame

NOV. 23
Stanford at California

NOV. 30
North Carolina at NC State

BOSTON COLLEGE EAGLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 57 | ACC PREDICTION: 12 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 3-5 ACC

OFFENSE The Boston College offense will once again be led by returning starting quarterback Thomas Castellanos. The UCF transfer had some highlight-reel runs last season while rushing for 1,113 yards — a team record for a quarterback. Running back Kye Robichaux, a returning starter, will have a new partner in the backfield with the addition of transfer Treshaun Ward (Kansas State/FSU).

Tight end Kamari Morales, a transfer from North Carolina, is the Tar Heels' all-time leader in TE touchdowns and should be a factor in the passing game. The wide receivers room shows plenty of promise: Lewis Bond has displayed great chemistry with Castellanos; sophomore Jaedn Skeete is growing into an ACC-caliber wideout; and Texas Tech transfer Jerand Bradley gives his QB a big (6-5) target, especially in the red zone.

DEFENSE Last season, the defense underperformed, finishing near the bottom of the country in several categories, including sacks and points allowed. But with new defensive coordinator Tim Lewis leading the unit, expect a more chaotic and disruptive group.

In the passing game, edge rushers Donovan Ezeiruaku and Neto Okpala will need to get more pressure on the quarterback. BC retooled its secondary with the additions of transfers Ryan Turner (Ohio State) and Bryquice Brown (Georgia State), and with Amari Jackson and Max Tucker returning, the Eagles should have some depth at cornerback. Safety is a position in flux, with Jalen Cheek transitioning from cornerback and the inexperienced Bugg Jones getting time with the starters in the spring.

Kam Arnold, now in his fifth season, is a solid but not particularly flashy player who will lead the linebacking corps.

SPECIALISTS Liam Connor returns to handle placekicking duties after going 11-of-14 on field goals in 2023. Sam Candotti, last year's starting punter, had some competition in spring practice. The Eagles, who need some juice on kickoff returns, brought in Vanderbilt's Jayden McGowan, who averaged 24.3 yards and had a kickoff return for a touchdown.

FINAL ANALYSIS Many were shocked when former head coach Jeff Hafley left for the defensive coordinator job with the Green Bay Packers, but the Eagles may have lucked out, as they brought in new head coach Bill O'Brien, who seems like a perfect fit. His work with some legendary quarterbacks could have a profound impact on Castellanos. O'Brien and his staff are striving to make this team more like the Eagles teams of old — physical and tough — and if they can do that, BC (which has a brutal schedule this season) could shock a few teams.

2024 SCHEDULE

Sept. 2	at Florida State
Sept. 7	Duquesne
Sept. 14	at Missouri
Sept. 21	Michigan State
Sept. 28	WKU
Oct. 5	at Virginia
Oct. 17	at Virginia Tech
Oct. 25	Louisville
Nov. 9	Syracuse
Nov. 16	at SMU
Nov. 23	North Carolina
Nov. 30	Pittsburgh

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 3-5 ACC)

Sept. 2	Northern Illinois (ot)	L	24-27
Sept. 9	Holy Cross	W	31-28
Sept. 16	Florida State	L	29-31
Sept. 23	at Louisville	L	28-56
Sept. 30	Virginia	W	27-24
Oct. 7	at Army	W	27-24
Oct. 21	at Georgia Tech	W	38-23
Oct. 28	Connecticut	W	21-14
Nov. 3	at Syracuse	W	17-10
Nov. 11	Virginia Tech	L	22-48
Nov. 16	at Pittsburgh	L	16-24
Nov. 24	Miami	L	20-45
Dec. 28	vs. SMU #	W	23-14

#Fenway Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ryan Boultwood, TE	★★★
2.	Syair Torrence, ATH	★★★
3.	Judah Pruitt, OL	★★★
4.	Jonathan Montague, QB	★★★
5.	Jayzen Flint, EDGE	★★★
6.	Pape Abdoulaye, OL	★★★
7.	Ashton McShane, CB	★★★
8.	Charlie Comella, ATH	★★★
9.	Omar Thornton, LB	★★★
10.	Jordan Lafontant, OL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bill O'Brien • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 15-9 (2 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Will Lawing • Defensive Coordinator: Tim Lewis • Location: Chestnut Hill, Mass.
Stadium: Alumni Stadium (44,500)

Thomas Castellanos

SCOUTING THE EAGLES

"Bill [O'Brien] has all the experience in the world, I think the issue here is that this job isn't getting any easier. They overachieved to a certain degree last season because a lot of people believe [former coach Jeff] Hafley's move was to get out of there before they fell under .500 and he got fired. ... Keeping [quarterback Thomas] Castellanos was a huge deal for them because he could have a breakout season with an offensive-minded guy like Bill. But scheme isn't their problem; it's just a hard place to recruit to when you're competing with the top-end programs of this league."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	11	**LEWIS BOND (JR.)**	13	Dino Tomlin (Sr.)
WR	6	Jaedn Skeete (So.)	4	Jayden McGowan (Jr.)
WR	9	Jerand Bradley (Jr.)	10	Reed Harris (Fr.)
LT	71	Jude Bowry (So.)	72	Jack Funke (So.)
LG	65	**LOGAN TAYLOR (JR.)**	53	Dwayne Allick (Sr.)
C	66	**DREW KENDALL (JR.)**	53	Dwayne Allick (Sr.)
RG	67	Jack Conley (Sr.)	56	Eryx Daugherty (Fr.)
RT	70	**OZZY TRAPILO (SR.)**	79	Kevin Cline (Sr.)
TE	88	Kamari Morales (Sr.)	17	**JEREMIAH FRANKLIN (JR.)**
QB	1	**THOMAS CASTELLANOS (JR.)**	14	Grayson James (Jr.)
RB	5	**KYE ROBICHAUX (SR.)**	0	Treshaun Ward (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	6	**DONOVAN EZIERUAKU (SR.)**	17	Edwin Kolenge (So.)
NT	96	**CAM HORSLEY (SR.)**	55	Kwan Williams (Jr.)
DT	91	**GEORGE ROOKS**	98	Nigel Tate (Jr.)
DE	4	**NETO OKPALA (SR.)**	95	Clive Wilson (So.
SLB	27	Daveon Crouch (Jr.)	7	Sione Hala (So.)
MLB	5	Kam Arnold (Sr.)	33	Owen McGowan (Jr.)
WLB	2	Bryce Steele (Jr.)	8	Jaylen Blackwell (Jr.)
CB	24	**AMARI JACKSON (JR.)**	19	Bryquice Brown (Sr.)
CB	38	Max Tucker (So.)	28	Carter Davis (Fr.)
SS	25	Bugg Jones (Jr.)	21	Victor Nelson (Sr.)
FS	10	Jalen Cheek (Jr.)	20	KP Price (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	95	Liam Connor (Jr.)	KR	4	Jayden McGowan (Jr.)
P	43	Sam Candotti (Jr.)	PR	11	Lewis Bond (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Eric Canha-USA TODAY Sports

Jaydn Ott

SCOUTING THE GOLDEN BEARS

"Is there a tougher situation for a football program than these guys? They have to recruit California to play on the East Coast and fight with a school that doesn't support football. [Justin] Wilcox could go work as a coordinator somewhere else and leave that headache behind. ... They really fell apart on defense last year, which is weird because the offense had been the obvious problem there for most of Justin's time, and they've got to a decent place on that side. The running back is their best player, and they're running a QB competition for the job through spring and summer. ... Give that staff credit — they have to battle through a lot to make that program work."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	5	Tobias Merriweather (Jr.)	6	Jonathan Brady (Jr.)
WR	83	**TROND GRIZZELL (JR.)**	13	Nyziah Hunter (Fr.)
WR	8	Mikey Matthews (So.)	11	Mavin Anderson (Jr.)
LT	52	Nick Morrow (Fr.)		Braden Miller (So.)
LG	74	**MATTHEW WYKOFF (JR.)**	63	Rush Reimer (Sr.)
C	76	Bastian Swinney (Jr.)	65	Dylan Jemtegaard (Jr.)
RG	71	**SIOAPE VATIKANI (JR.)**	68	Trent Ramsey (So.)
RT	72	**T.J. SESSION (SR.)**	78	Victor Stoffel (Sr.)
TE	87	**JACK ENDRIES (SO.)**	88	J.T. Byrne (Jr.)
QB	15	**FERNANDO MENDOZA (SO.)**	7	Chandler Rogers (Sr.)
RB	1	**JAYDN OTT (JR.)**	2	Kadarius Calloway (Sr.)

DEFENSE (8)

DT	98	Nate Burrell (So.)	**91**	**RICKY CORREIA (JR.)**
DT	99	**ETHAN SAUNDERS (JR.)**	96	Derek Wilkins (So.)
OLB	44	**XAVIER CARLTON (SR.)**	43	Ryan McCulloch (So.)
ILB	0	**CADE ULUAVE (SO.)**	10	Sergio Allen (So.)
ILB		Teddye Buchanan (Sr.)	31	Hunter Barth (Jr.)
OLB	7	David Reese (Sr.)	92	Myles Williams
CB	3	**NOHL WILLIAMS (JR.)**	**15**	**LU-MAGIA HEARNS III (JR.)**
CB	5	Marcus Harris (Sr.)	24	Marcus Scott II (So.)
NB	22	**MATTHEW LITTLEJOHN (JR.)**	6	Ja'ir Smith (Jr.)
S	2	**CRAIG WOODSON (SR.)**	23	Isaiah Crosby (Jr.)
S	13	Miles Williams (Jr.)	11	Dayday Aupiu (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	40	Ryan Coe (Sr.)	KR	8 Mikey Matthews (So.)
P	37	Lachlan Wilson (Sr.)	PR	8 Mikey Matthews (So.)

Returning starters in ***BOLD***

Darren Yamashita-USA TODAY Sports

CALIFORNIA GOLDEN BEARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 51 | ACC PREDICTION: 10 | 2023 RECORD: 6-7, 4-5 PAC-12

OFFENSE Cal's offense took a long-awaited leap when sophomore Fernando Mendoza took over at quarterback in Week 6, with the Bears averaging 41 points in Pac-12 games vs. Oregon State, USC, Washington State and UCLA. Mendoza had plenty of good moments, including 14 touchdown passes, but he also had 10 interceptions and four lost fumbles. Cal brought in transfer Chandler Rogers, who passed for 3,382 yards and 29 TDs last fall at North Texas, and the two competed through spring ball.

New offensive coordinator Mike Bloesch, who also handles an improving offensive line, will build around running back Jaydn Ott, who led the Pac-12 with 1,315 rushing yards and scored 15 total touchdowns. Old Dominion transfer Kadarius Calloway leads a deep group behind Ott.

The Bears lost top target Jeremiah Hunter to Washington, but Trond Grizzell returns after a surprise debut season, and Notre Dame transfer Tobias Merriweather is among three newcomers at wide receiver.

DEFENSE The Bears shared the FBS lead with 28 takeaways, but they were vulnerable to the pass, thanks to an inconsistent pass rush and subpar play in the secondary. The result was a defense that allowed 32.8 points per game, the Bears' worst performance of the Justin Wilcox era.

Defensive coordinator Peter Sirmon has high hopes for veteran outside linebackers David Reese and Xavier Carlton, and inside linebacker Cade Uluave is poised to take on a starring role after being named Pac-12 Freshman Defensive Player of the Year.

Second-team All-Pac-12 safety Craig Woodson will be joined in the secondary by newcomers Marcus Harris and Ja'ir Smith, who both showed promise during spring ball.

SPECIALISTS Ryan Coe, who made 48-of-61 field-goal tries during stops at FCS Delaware, Cincinnati and North Carolina, takes over as placekicker. Lachlan Wilson returns as punter after averaging 44.5 yards last fall to land second-team all-conference honors.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Bears closed out a century in the Pac-12 with a 14th consecutive losing conference record. Cal now must adapt to playing in the ACC on the opposite coast in the age of NIL and the transfer portal.

Cal, which has often been good defensively under Wilcox, needs a return to form. The offense, with two capable quarterbacks and a star at running back in Ott, should continue to ascend if turnovers are limited.

The Bears won't face the gauntlet of NFL-bound quarterbacks that highlighted their 2023 schedule, but being competitive team in the ACC will be a challenge for a program that often seems slightly out of rhythm.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	UC Davis
Sept. 7	at Auburn
Sept. 14	San Diego State
Sept. 21	at Florida State
Oct. 5	Miami
Oct. 12	at Pittsburgh
Oct. 19	NC State
Oct. 26	Oregon State
Nov. 8	at Wake Forest
Nov. 16	Syracuse
Nov. 23	Stanford
Nov. 30	at SMU

2023 RESULTS (6-7, 4-5 PAC-12)

Sept. 2	at North Texas	W	58-21
Sept. 9	Auburn	L	10-14
Sept. 16	Idaho	W	31-17
Sept. 23	at Washington	L	32-59
Sept. 30	Arizona State	W	24-21
Oct. 7	Oregon State	L	40-52
Oct. 14	at Utah	L	14-34
Oct. 28	USC	L	49-50
Nov. 4	at Oregon	L	19-63
Nov. 11	Washington State	W	42-39
Nov. 18	at Stanford	W	27-15
Nov. 25	at UCLA	W	33-7
Dec. 16	vs. Texas Tech #	L	14-34

#Independence Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Trevor Rogers, WR	★★★★
2.	EJ Caminong, QB	★★★
3.	Brooklyn Cheek, S	★★★
4.	Dayton Aupiu, S	★★★
5.	Jamaal Wiley, RB	★★★
6.	Ja'ir Smith, CB	★★★
7.	BJ Canady, DL	★★★
8.	Josiah Martin, WR	★★★
9.	Camden Jones, TE	★★★
10.	Aiden Newbill, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Justin Wilcox • Record at School: 36-43 (7 years) • Career Record: 36-43 (7 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Mike Bloesch • Defensive Coordinator: Peter Sirmon • Location: Berkeley, Calif.
Stadium: Memorial Stadium (63,000)

CLEMSON TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 15 | ACC PREDICTION: 2 | 2023 RECORD: 9-4, 4-4 ACC

OFFENSE Heading into 2023, quarterback Cade Klubnik was being floated as a dark horse Heisman Trophy candidate. That buzz quickly fizzled as the Tigers started 2-2 and finished with their worst record since 2011. Klubnik's talent is undeniable, but he was far too up and down as a first-year starter, posting a 19-9 touchdown-to-interception ratio and a No. 80 national ranking in QBR.

Highly regarded offensive coordinator Garrett Riley promised explosiveness, but his unit rarely looked the part during his first year, as the Tigers ranked No. 50 nationally in total yards per game.

To reach an elite level, this group needs more consistency from Klubnik, more push from the offensive line and more production from the wide receivers. Phil Mafah (965 yards, 13 TDs) will be one of the ACC's best running backs, and tight end Jake Briningstool (498 receiving yards) is a future pro. Two new, highly touted WR recruits could provide a boost.

DEFENSE New coordinator? No problem. Under former analyst Wes Goodwin, who succeeded the legendary Brent Venables in 2022, Clemson dazzled once again, finishing in the top 10 nationally in total defense and passing defense while tying for the national lead in turnovers forced (28).

Clemson, as per usual, will be replacing NFL draft picks at multiple positions. Veteran linebacker Barrett Carter (67 tackles, 3.5 sacks) and safety R.J. Mickens (50 tackles) both opted to return for 2024, though, and will soften that blow. So will Peter Woods and T.J. Parker, two of the country's best young defensive linemen. And it won't take long for true freshman Sammy Brown, the highest-ranked linebacker recruit in program history, to emerge as a rotation player.

A regression in turnovers feels inevitable, but this should be a strong, deep unit. There could be some learning moments at cornerback, though.

SPECIALISTS Last year, Clemson's starting kicker struggled so much that head coach Dabo Swinney brought a former walk-on out of retirement to finish the season. True freshman Nolan Hauser, who hit a national-record 66 field goals in high school, could hold things down in 2024. The Tigers will use a mix of wide receivers on kick and punt returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Five straight wins to end the 2023 season should give Clemson confidence. But what is the Tigers' ceiling? They have been an AP preseason top-10 team the past three years but finished no higher than No. 13 in the final poll during that span. Clemson is still an upper-tier ACC team but has work to do to be a playoff contender. The season opener against Georgia may set the tone, for better or for worse.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	vs. Georgia #
Sept. 7	App State
Sept. 21	NC State
Sept. 28	Stanford
Oct. 5	at Florida State
Oct. 12	at Wake Forest
Oct. 19	Virginia
Nov. 2	Louisville
Nov. 9	at Virginia Tech
Nov. 16	at Pittsburgh
Nov. 23	The Citadel
Nov. 30	South Carolina

#Atlanta, GA

2023 RESULTS (9-4, 4-4 ACC)

Sept. 4	at Duke	L	7-28
Sept. 9	Charleston Southern	W	66-17
Sept. 16	Florida Atlantic	W	48-14
Sept. 23	Florida State (ot)	L	24-31
Sept. 30	at Syracuse	W	31-14
Oct. 7	Wake Forest	W	17-12
Oct. 21	at Miami (ot)	L	20-28
Oct. 28	at NC State	L	17-24
Nov. 4	Notre Dame	W	31-23
Nov. 11	Georgia Tech	W	42-21
Nov. 18	North Carolina	W	31-20
Nov. 25	at South Carolina	W	16-7
Dec. 29	vs. Kentucky #	W	38-35

#Gator Bowl

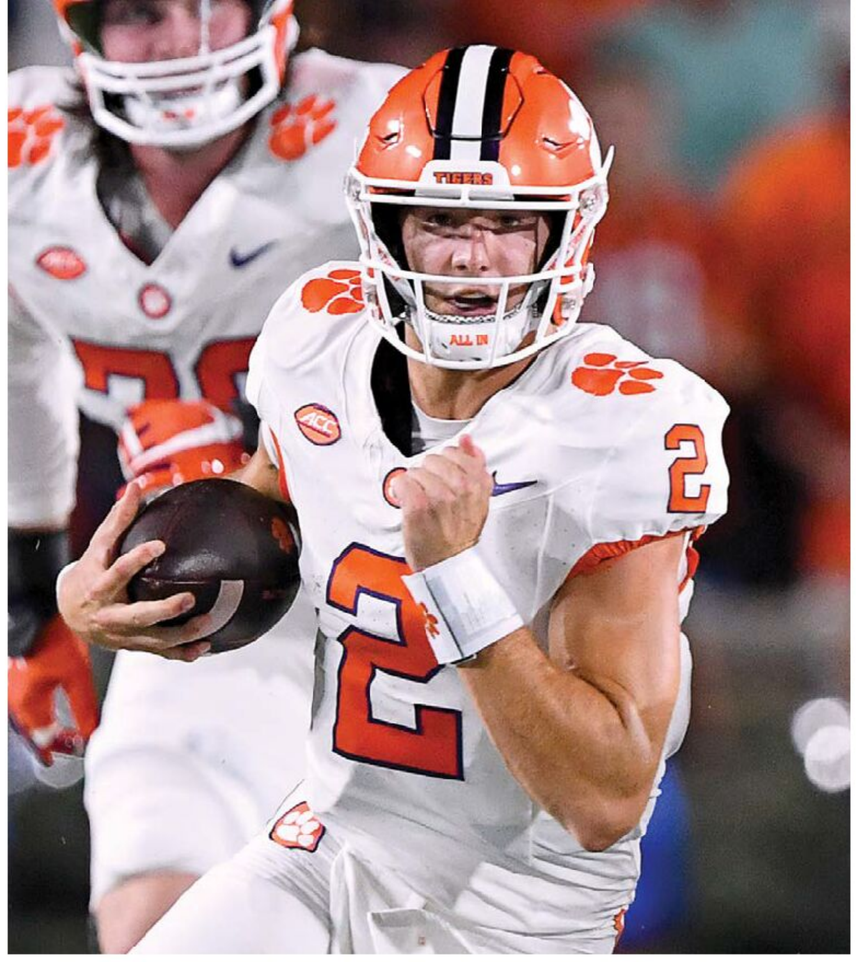
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	T.J. Moore, WR	★★★★★
2.	Sammy Brown, LB	★★★★★
3.	Corian Gipson, CB	★★★★
4.	Bryant Wesco Jr., WR	★★★★
5.	Christian Bentacur, TE	★★★★
6.	Elyjah Thurmon, OL	★★★★
7.	Ricardo Jones, S	★★★★
8.	Devid Eziomume, RB	★★★★
9.	Darien Mayo, EDGE	★★★★
10.	Hevin Brown-Shuler, DL	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dabo Swinney • Record at School: 170-43 (15+ years) • Career Record: 170-43 (15+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Garrett Riley • Defensive Coordinator: Wes Goodwin • Location: Clemson, S.C.
Stadium: Memorial Stadium (81,500)



Cade Klubnik

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"2024 could be a turning point for this program under Dabo [Swinney]. The writing is on the wall — you can't ignore the transfer market, and you have to play ball with NIL. How will he respond to that? Hiring [offensive line coach] Matt Luke was a really sharp move. There's this idea out there that Dabo won't listen to outsiders, and Matt's a guy who can bridge the gap. He's worked in the SEC forever, he knows how to recruit at the highest level and he knows how to manage the politics and dynamics. He could really help. [QB Cade] Klubnik is the real deal; when you watch his '23 tape, he turns a corner as the season goes. He's starting to get it, and he could break out as a true superstar this season."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	22	Cole Turner (So.)	10	Troy Stellato (Jr.)
WR	6	**TYLER BROWN (SO.)**		T.J. Moore (Fr.)
WR	0	**ANTONIO WILLIAMS (SO.)**	12	Bryant Wesco Jr. (Fr.)
LT	71	**TRISTAN LEIGH (JR.)**	50	Collin Sadler (So.)
LG	74	**MARCUS TATE (SR.)**	52	Elyjah Thurmon (Fr.)
C	53	Ryan Linthicum (Jr.)	75	Trent Howard (Sr.)
RG	64	**WALKER PARKS (SR.)**	55	Harris Sewell (So.)
RT	78	**BLAKE MILLER (JR.)**	50	Collin Sadler (So.)
TE	9	**JAKE BRININGSTOOL (SR.)**	5	Josh Sapp (So.)
QB	2	**CADE KLUBNIK (JR.)**	17	Christopher Vizzina (Fr.)
RB	7	Phil Mafah (Sr.)	19	Keith Adams Jr. (So.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	3	T.J. Parker (So.)	99	A.J. Hoffler (So.)
DT	55	Payton Page (Sr.)	90	Stephiylan Green (Fr.)
DT	19	DeMonte Capehart (Sr.)	45	Vic Burley (Fr.)
DE	11	Peter Woods (So.)	44	Cade Denhoff (Jr.)
SLB	7	Khalil Barnes (So.)	17	Wade Woodaz (Jr.)
MLB	47	Sammy Brown (Fr.)	21	Kobe McCloud (So.)
WLB	0	**BARRETT CARTER (SR.)**	32	Jamal Anderson (So.)
CB	20	Avieon Terrell (So.)	6	Tavoy Feagin (Fr.)
CB	2	Shelton Lewis (So.)	10	Jeadyn Lukus (Jr.)
SS	9	**R.J. MICKENS (SR.)**	5	Sherrod Covil Jr. (Jr.)
FS	18	Kylon Griffin (So.)	24	Tyler Venables (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	81	Nolan Hauser (Fr.)	KR	21	Jarvis Green (Fr.)
P	39	Aidan Swanson (Sr.)	PR	6	Tyler Brown (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Ken Ruinard-USA TODAY Sports

Jordan Moore

SCOUTING THE BLUE DEVILS

"Manny [Diaz] was a great pick here; they want to recreate what [Mike] Elko did and find a guy who can recruit and develop great defensive talent. That said, it's going to be a significant step back because they've lost their staff, their quarterback and most of the recruiting class they had lined up. ... They need to rebuild the offensive line, and the quarterback will probably end up being the Texas transfer [Maalik Murphy]. ... The identity will be all defense. Manny's time at Miami was more consistent than the guy they fired him for. He knows how to run a program, and Elko helped tremendously by showing that Duke football can be relevant."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	8	**JORDAN MOORE (SR.)**	5	Javon Harvey (So.)
WR	4	**ELI PANCOL (SR.)**	1	Jontavis Robertson (Sr.)
WR	2	**SAHMIR HAGANS (JR.)**	14	Sean Brown (Fr.)
LT	73	Zachary Franks (Sr.)	66	Caleb Dorris (Fr.)
LG	77	**JUSTIN PICKETT (JR.)**	60	Tony Boggs (Fr.)
C	72	Matt Craycraft (So.)	52	Mike Barr (Sr.)
RG	52	Mike Barr (Sr.)	64	Eric Shon (Sr.)
RT	53	**BRIAN PARKER II (SO.)**	71	James Pogorelc (Sr.)
TE	81	Jeremiah Hasley (So.)	80	Vance Bolyard (Fr.)
QB	5	Maalik Murphy (So.)	12	Grayson Loftis (So.)
RB	9	Jaquez Moore (Sr.)	10	Peyton Jones (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	19	Vincent Anthony Jr. (Jr.)	40	Ryan Smith (Sr.)
DT	96	Aaron Hall (Jr.)	51	Dave Anderson (Fr.)
DT	91	Kendy Charles (Sr.)	93	Will Seiler (Sr.)
DE	97	Wesley Williams (So.)	59	Michael Reese (Sr.)
LB	12	**TRE FREEMAN (JR.)**	42	Kendall Johnson (Fr.)
LB	36	Nick Morris Jr. (Jr.)	39	Ozzie Nicholas (Sr.)
NB	4	Cameron Bergeron (Sr.)	9	Kenzy Paul (So.)
CB	0	**CHANDLER RIVERS (JR.)**	22	Moussa Kane (Fr.)
CB	26	Joshua Pickett (Sr.)	24	Kimari Robinson (Fr.)
S	23	Terry Moore (Jr.)	20	DaShawn Stone (Fr.)
S	2	**JAYLEN STINSON (SR.)**	15	Placide Djungu-Sungu (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	29	Todd Pelino (Jr.)	KR 23	Terry Moore (Jr.)
P	56	Kade Reynoldson (Fr.)	PR 2	Sahmir Hagans (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Jim Dedmon-USA TODAY Sports

DUKE BLUE DEVILS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 69 | ACC PREDICTION: 14 | 2023 RECORD: 8-5, 4-4 ACC

OFFENSE New head coach Manny Diaz quickly landed former Texas quarterback Maalik Murphy in the transfer portal, easing the pain of Riley Leonard's transfer to Notre Dame.

Though running back Jordan Waters transferred to NC State, the Blue Devils retain plenty of skill-position talent, including running back Jaquez Moore (674 yards, six TDs last season). At wide receiver, Jordan Moore is back after a strong junior season in which he caught 62 passes for 835 yards and eight touchdowns. Keep an eye on Old Dominion transfer Javon Harvey at wide receiver, too.

The line is a concern with some key players having departed, including all-ACC left tackle Graham Barton. Transfer tackles Zachary Franks (Northwestern) and James Pogorelc (Stanford) arrive this summer to join junior guard Justin Pickett and sophomores Brian Parker II (tackle) and Matt Craycraft (center/guard).

DEFENSE The transfer portal and the NFL Draft took Duke's four starting defensive linemen plus linebacker Dorian Mausi and safety Brandon Johnson. The good news: The team's top three tacklers are back in linebacker Tre Freeman, safety Jaylen Stinson and linebacker Nick Morris Jr.

Up front, Vincent Anthony Jr., Michael Reese, Wesley Williams and Ryan Smith are effective edge rushers who need to produce more. Like those four, Aaron Hall steps into a starting role on the defensive line after strong play as a reserve. Liberty transfer Kendy Charles shows promise.

Freeman and Morris give Duke two experienced starting linebackers.

In the secondary, the hard-hitting Stinson (88 tackles last season) is a proven tackler, while Chandler Rivers has quickly developed into a solid cover corner. Newcomers are filling the remaining roles.

SPECIALISTS Former walk-on Todd Pelino showed a strong, if not always accurate, leg, making 18-of-23 field goals. He didn't miss an extra point. All-ACC punter Porter Wilson is gone, so freshman Kade Reynoldson from Australia will be thrown into action. Duke needs to find explosiveness in the return game. Running backs Peyton Jones and Marquise Collins could provide it, but they are unproven.

FINAL ANALYSIS If Duke is to produce a third consecutive winning season, it needs Diaz to work magic with a defense that lost big-time production from last season. The offense has potential to be strong with proven skill players in the lineup. But it only works if the offensive line comes together. That's far from a certainty given the turnover up front.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Elon
Sept. 7	at Northwestern
Sept. 14	Connecticut
Sept. 21	at Middle Tenn.
Sept. 28	North Carolina
Oct. 5	at Georgia Tech
Oct. 18	Florida State
Oct. 26	SMU
Nov. 2	at Miami
Nov. 9	at NC State
Nov. 23	Virginia Tech
Nov. 30	at Wake Forest

2023 RESULTS (8-5, 4-4 ACC)

Sept. 4	Clemson	W	28-7
Sept. 9	Lafayette	W	42-7
Sept. 16	Northwestern	W	38-14
Sept. 23	at Connecticut	W	41-7
Sept. 30	Notre Dame	L	14-21
Oct. 14	NC State	W	24-3
Oct. 21	at Florida State	L	20-38
Oct. 28	at Louisville	L	0-23
Nov. 2	Wake Forest	W	24-21
Nov. 11	at North Carolina (ot)	L	45-47
Nov. 18	at Virginia	L	27-30
Nov. 25	Pittsburgh	W	30-19
Dec. 23	vs. Troy #	W	17-10

#Birmingham Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jack Small, OT	★★★
2.	Chase Tyler, WR	★★★
3.	Kyren Condoll, CB	★★★
4.	Kobe Smith, EDGE	★★★
5.	Landan Callahan, S	★★★
6.	Preston Watson, DL	★★★
7.	Gemyel Allen, OL	★★★
8.	Brett Elliott, TE	★★★
9.	Bradley Smith, OL	★★★
10.	Jayden Moore, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Manny Diaz • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 21-15 (3 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Jonathan Brewer • Defensive Coordinator: Jonathan Patke • Location: Durham, N.C.
Stadium: Wallace Wade Stadium (40,004)

FLORIDA STATE SEMINOLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 12 | ACC PREDICTION: 1 | 2023 RECORD: 13-1, 8-0 ACC

OFFENSE Head coach Mike Norvell faces the tough task of replacing one of the best quarterbacks in program history (Jordan Travis). The Seminoles also lost their leading rusher (Trey Benson), top two wide receivers (Keon Coleman, Johnny Wilson) and most productive tight end (Jaheim Bell).

FSU welcomes Oregon State grad transfer DJ Uiagalelei to bridge the gap at QB while youngsters such as Brock Glenn and Luke Kromenhoek mature. Uiagalelei's experience and arm offer FSU a path to another playoff run. Expect plenty of deep passes as the offense looks to stretch the field.

The offensive line has combined for 190 starts at the FBS level, 123 at Florida State. The health of center Maurice Smith and offensive tackle Robert Scott Jr. will determine whether the unit is elite or merely good.

That experience up front will serve Uiagalelei well as he builds chemistry with an array of skill players. Kentron Poitier, Ja'Khi Douglas, Hykeem Williams and Destyn Hill are among the returning receivers. Alabama transfer Malik Benson looks primed to play a big role alongside LSU transfer Jalen Brown. The running back room doesn't have an established star, but it's a talented group from top to bottom. The tight ends are a wild card, with three of last year's top TEs no longer on the roster.

DEFENSE Defensive coordinator Adam Fuller has plenty of holes to fill, but he has established a solid nucleus of up-and-coming players who are ready to take the next step. Patrick Payton, Joshua Farmer, DJ Lundy, Azareye'h Thomas and Shyheim Brown will be relied upon to lead a defense that was the only unit in the country to allow fewer completions than incompletions last season. They'll be aided by transfer additions such as Georgia's Marvin Jones Jr, West Virginia's Tomiwa Durojaiye, Oregon State's Sione Lolohea and Alabama's Earl Little Jr.

Florida State should be able to lean on the defense while the offense assimilates its new pieces early in the year.

SPECIALISTS All-America returner and Indiana transfer Jaylin Lucas joins one of the most experienced kicking rooms in the country alongside Australian punter Alex Mastromanno and redshirt senior Ryan Fitzgerald. Special teams will be a strength once again in 2024.

FINAL ANALYSIS Florida State will have plenty of questions to answer early on, but a favorable schedule should benefit the Seminoles through the first month of the season. The Seminoles have improved their record in each of Norvell's four seasons with the program. It wouldn't be a surprise to see this squad make a run to another ACC championship and the College Football Playoff, especially with the field being increased to 12 teams.

2023 RESULTS (13-1, 8-0 ACC)

Sept. 3	vs. LSU #	W	45-24
Sept. 9	Southern Miss	W	66-13
Sept. 16	at Boston College	W	31-29
Sept. 23	at Clemson (ot)	W	31-24
Oct. 7	Virginia Tech	W	39-17
Oct. 14	Syracuse	W	41-3
Oct. 21	Duke	W	38-20
Oct. 28	at Wake Forest	W	41-16
Nov. 4	at Pittsburgh	W	24-7
Nov. 11	Miami	W	27-20
Nov. 18	North Alabama	W	58-13
Nov. 25	at Florida	W	24-15
Dec. 2	vs. Louisville %	W	16-6
Dec. 30	vs. Georgia &	L	3-63

#Orlando %Charlotte &Orange Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 24	vs. Georgia Tech #
Sept. 2	Boston College
Sept. 14	Memphis
Sept. 21	California
Sept. 28	at SMU
Oct. 5	Clemson
Oct. 18	at Duke
Oct. 26	at Miami
Nov. 2	North Carolina
Nov. 9	at Notre Dame
Nov. 23	Charleston South.
Nov. 30	Florida

#Dublin, Ireland

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Luke Kromenhoek, QB ★★★★★
2. Jamari Howard, CB ★★★★
3. Charles Lester III, CB ★★★★
4. Elijah Moore, WR ★★★★
5. Cai Bates, CB ★★★★
6. Kam Davis, RB ★★★★
7. Jonathan Daniels, OT ★★★★
8. Landen Thomas, TE ★★★★
9. DD Holmes, EDGE ★★★★
10. Amaree Williams, EDGE ★★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Norvell • Record at School: 31-17 (4 years)
Career Record: 69-32 (8 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Alex Atkins
Defensive Coordinator: Adam Fuller • Location: Tallahassee, Fla.
Stadium: Doak Campbell Stadium (79,560)

Patrick Payton

SCOUTING THE SEMINOLES

"Give [Mike] Norvell credit; they navigated a really weird year and kept the program going at a top level. They might not be 13-0 again this year, but they are suing their own conference, so there's another big distraction like last year's undefeated streak. He's done a fantastic job keeping all that noise out of their program. ... The roster is following the same blueprint as last year. In the spring, they had a bunch of breakout guys who were just transferring in at key positions, like quarterback and defensive end. Mike's maybe the closest in the industry to deciphering how to balance four-year high school recruiting, team culture and portal hunting. It worked for them last season, and they should be back in the hunt again this season."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	1	Kentron Poitier (Sr.)	8	Hykeem Williams (So.)
WR	10	Malik Benson (Sr.)	21	Darion Williamson (Sr.)
WR	0	Ja'Khi Douglas (Sr.)	7	Destyn Hill (So.)
LT	76	**DARIUS WASHINGTON (SR.)**	52	Robert Scott Jr. (Sr.)
LG	67	Richie Leonard IV (Sr.)	69	TJ Ferguson (Jr.)
C	53	**MAURICE SMITH (SR.)**		Jacob Rizy (Jr.)
RG	75	Keiondre Jones (Sr.)	72	Julian Armella (So.)
RT	63	**JEREMIAH BYERS (SR.)**	65	Andre Otto (Fr.)
TE	84	**KYLE MORLOCK (SR.)**	48	Jackson West (Jr.)
QB	4	DJ Uiagalelei (Sr.)	11	Brock Glenn (Fr.)
RB	26	Caziah Holmes (Sr.)	9	Lawrance Toafili (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	11	**PATRICK PAYTON (JR.)**	54	Byron Turner Jr. (Jr.)
DT	5	**JOSHUA FARMER (JR.)**	19	Tomiwa Durojaiye (So.)
DT	6	Darrell Jackson Jr. (Jr.)	90	Grady Kelly (Jr.)
DE	7	Marvin Jones Jr. (Jr.)	13	Sione Lolohea (Sr.)
LB	10	DJ Lundy (Sr.)	28	Justin Cryer (So.)
MLB	20	Blake Nichelson (So.)	15	Shawn Murphy (So.)
CB	8	Azareye'h Thomas (Jr.)	16	Quindarrius Jones (So.)
CB	23	**FENTRELL CYPRESS II (SR.)**	30	Ja'Bril Rawls (Fr.)
NB	0	Earl Little Jr. (So.)	3	Kevin Knowles II (Sr.)
BUCK	1	**SHYHEIM BROWN (JR.)**	27	Ashlynd Barker (So.)
S	12	Conrad Hussey (So.)	22	Davonte Brown (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	88	Ryan Fitzgerald (Sr.)	KR	13	Jaylin Lucas (Jr.)
P	29	Alex Mastromanno (Sr.)	PR	13	Jaylin Lucas (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Jim Dedmon-USA TODAY Sports

Haynes King

SCOUTING THE YELLOW JACKETS

"Brent [Key] did one of the best jobs in the entire FBS last season; he doesn't get enough credit for bringing back the program's tough identity and fighting through without the resources you get at their competitors. They've figured out what works, who they are, and they embrace physical football like they did under [former head coach] Paul [Johnson] ... Probably the best thing you can say about them is that a few guys other coaches in the league thought would jump in the portal didn't. That's how you really turn things around, if you can keep those breakout young guys and build off of them. They're not an elite-ceiling program like FSU or Clemson, but they're back on track to be competitive."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	8	**MALIK RUTHERFORD (JR.)**	9	Avery Boyd (Sr.)
WR	2	**ERIC SINGLETON JR. (SO.)**	4	Abdul Janneh (Sr.)
WR	0	Christian Leary (Sr.)	7	Chase Lane (Sr.)
LT	78	**ETHAN MACKENNY (SO.)**	55	Corey Robinson (Jr.)
LG	67	**JOE FUSILE (JR.)**	58	Brandon Best (So.)
C	72	**WESTON FRANKLIN (SR.)**	50	Tana Alo-Tupuola (Fr.)
RG	55	Corey Robinson II (Jr.)	74	Benjamin Galloway (So.)
RT	54	**JORDAN WILLIAMS (SR.)**	52	Harrison Moore (Fr.)
TE	80	Brett Seither (Sr.)	86	Ryland Goede (Sr.)
QB	10	**HAYNES KING (JR.)**	5	Zach Pyron (Jr.)
RB	11	**JAMAL HAYNES (JR.)**	3	Trey Cooley (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	8	**MAKIUS SCOTT (SR.)**		Romello Height (Jr.)
NT	88	**ZEEK BIGGERS (SR.)**	8	Makius Scott (Jr.)
DT	55	Horace Lockett (So.)	32	Sylvain Yondjouen (Sr.)
RUSH	11	Kevin Harris (Sr.)	27	Joshua Robinson (Sr.)
LB	44	**KYLE EFFORD (SO.)**	17	Jackson Hamilton (Jr.)
LB	40	Trenilyas Tatum (Sr.)	2	E.J. Lightsey (So.)
CB	3	Ahmari Harvey (Jr.)	22	D.J. Moore (So.)
CB	4	Warren Burrell (Sr.)	6	Rodney Shelley (Jr.)
NB	21	Omar Daniels (Jr.)	16	Syeed Gibbs (So.)
SS	1	**LAMILES BROOKS (SR.)**	29	Nico Dowdell (Fr.)
FS	5	Clayton Powell-Lee (Jr.)	7	Taye Seymore (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	33	Aidan Birr (So.)	KR	0 Christian Leary (Sr.)
P	43	David Shanahan (Sr.)	PR	6 Rodney Shelley (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Brett Davis-USA TODAY Sports

GEORGIA TECH YELLOW JACKETS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 47 | ACC PREDICTION: 9 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 5-3 ACC

OFFENSE Georgia Tech made an incredible leap in offensive production in 2023. Expectations are for the gaudy numbers from last season to be even better in 2024. The Yellow Jackets return four of five starting offensive linemen, star quarterback Haynes King, 1,000-yard rusher Jamal Haynes, leading receivers Eric Singleton Jr. and Malik Rutherford and tight end Brett Seither. And critically, head coach Brent Key retained co-offensive coordinators Buster Faulkner and Chris Weinke as well as offensive line coach Geep Wade.

Tech finished the '23 season first in the ACC (and 12th nationally) with 203.8 rushing yards per game. Haynes, a converted wide receiver, led the charge in becoming the program's first 1,000-yard rusher since 2017 with 1,059 yards on 174 carries.

King was undoubtedly the star, though, with 2,842 passing yards, 737 rushing yards and 37 touchdowns accounted for. The Texas A&M transfer completed 61.6 percent of his passes.

Three of Tech's top four wideouts are back as well in Singleton, Rutherford and Christian Leary. The lone holes to fill: finding a new starter at right guard and solidifying depth at tight end.

DEFENSE Tech's defense was poor in 2023, so much so that in the offseason Key hired four new assistants on that side of the ball in Jess Simpson, Kyle Pope, Cory Peoples and Tyler Santucci. Santucci, the new defensive coordinator, will implement a 4-2-5 base defense and try to improve a Jackets unit that gave up 221.3 yards per game on the ground last season.

The defensive front will be anchored by veterans Makius Scott, Eddie Kelly, Kevin Harris and Zeek Biggers. Leading tackler Kyle Efford and Trenilyas Tatum both return at linebacker, and the secondary features safeties LaMiles Brooks and Clayton Powell-Lee and cornerback Ahmari Harvey. But Tech needs to develop more depth and more playmakers at all defensive positions to take the next step in its trajectory under Key.

SPECIALISTS Aidan Birr made 17-of-19 field goals in 2023 and missed only one of his 38 extra-point tries. Veteran punter David Shanahan is also back. Leary is the team's primary kickoff return specialist, while cornerback Rodney Shelley is expected to field punts.

FINAL ANALYSIS What's the next step in Key's second season at his alma mater? Tech has a daunting schedule — every FBS opponent it plays made the postseason last year. Key's squad has the chance to do some special things on offense, but it will be right back in the middle of the ACC pack if it can't find answers on defense.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 24	vs. Florida St. #
Aug. 31	Georgia State
Sept. 7	at Syracuse
Sept. 14	VMI
Sept. 21	at Louisville
Oct. 5	Duke
Oct. 12	at North Carolina
Oct. 19	Notre Dame
Oct. 26	at Virginia Tech
Nov. 9	Miami
Nov. 21	NC State
Nov. 30	at Georgia

#Dublin, Ireland

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 5-3 ACC)

Sept. 1	Louisville	L	34-39
Sept. 9	South Carolina St.	W	48-13
Sept. 16	at Ole Miss	L	23-48
Sept. 23	at Wake Forest	W	30-16
Sept. 30	Bowling Green	L	27-38
Oct. 7	at Miami	W	23-20
Oct. 21	Boston College	L	23-38
Oct. 28	North Carolina	W	46-42
Nov. 4	at Virginia	W	45-17
Nov. 11	at Clemson	L	21-42
Nov. 18	Syracuse	W	31-22
Nov. 25	Georgia	L	23-31
Dec. 22	vs. UCF #	W	30-17

#Gasparilla Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Isaiah Canion, WR	★★★★
2.	Luke Harping, TE	★★★★
3.	Amontrae Bradford, EDGE	★★★★
4.	David Prince, TE	★★★
5.	Anthony Carrie, RB	★★★
6.	Graham Knowles, QB	★★★
7.	Jordan Boyd, EDGE	★★★
8.	Troy Stevenson, CB	★★★
9.	Kai Greer, OL	★★★
10.	Uche Iloh, EDGE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brent Key • Record at School: 11-10 (1-plus years) • Career Record: 11-10 (1-plus years)
Offensive Coordinators: Buster Faulkner, Chris Weinke • Defensive Coordinator: Tyler Santucci • Location: Atlanta, Ga.
Stadium: Bobby Dodd Stadium (55,000)

LOUISVILLE CARDINALS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 24 | ACC PREDICTION: 4 | 2023 RECORD: 10-4, 7-1 ACC

OFFENSE The Cardinals' offense will reflect head coach Jeff Brohm's style much more in Year 2. That's due in part to seventh-year quarterback Tyler Shough's decision to transfer to Louisville from Texas Tech. When healthy, Shough has a strong arm and gives U of L the ability to throw downfield while also picking up short yardage when necessary.

Chris Bell will likely be one of Shough's best weapons as a more physical receiver, while Ja'Corey Brooks, and Caullin Lacy add speed.

Louisville may not have the depth it wants at wide receiver, but the Cardinals compensate for that with an experienced tight end room. Louisville pulled in three transfers and returns players like Nate Kurisky and Jamari Johnson. Brohm expects Johnson to be a major contributor.

Brohm made varied use of his running backs last year, and the Cardinals have brought in another strong cast of backs this season. Whereas they thrived on speed a year ago, Miami transfer Donald Chaney brings size and physicality, which can also help in pass protection.

DEFENSE The Cardinals are shallow at some positions along the defensive line and at safety but have a strong group of cornerbacks that could prove to be a team strength. After losing Jarvis Brownlee, the Cardinals corralled Corey Thornton from UCF, Tahveon Nicholson from Illinois and Tayon Holloway from North Carolina while returning Quincy Riley. Defensive coordinator Ron English calls the cornerback room one of the best groups he's had in a long time.

Louisville lost a starting linebacker in Jaylin Alderman but returns talent and experience in TJ Quinn, the team's leading tackler, and Stanquan Clark, who showed great potential as a freshman.

And even though Louisville doesn't have the defensive line depth that it wants, getting Ashton Gillotte back while adding Thor Griffith from the transfer portal provides a huge boost. Gillotte played multiple spots on the line last season. After a year of acclimation, he's more comfortable and can take the next step in his development this season.

SPECIALISTS Although he struggled at points last season, Brock Travelstead provides continuity for U of L's kicking game; he made a 57-yard field goal during the spring game. Speed from Lacy and running back Maurice Turner also gives Louisville a dangerous element on special teams.

FINAL ANALYSIS Louisville will have more talent and experience in Year 2 under Brohm. The returning players are more comfortable in his system, while the newcomers bring more talent to a team that just played in the program's first ACC Championship Game last year. The Cardinals appear to have what it takes to make the conference title game again this season.

2023 RESULTS (10-4, 7-1 ACC)

Sept. 1	at Georgia Tech	W	39-34
Sept. 7	Murray State	W	56-0
Sept. 16	vs. Indiana #	W	21-14
Sept. 23	Boston College	W	56-28
Sept. 29	at NC State	W	13-10
Oct. 7	Notre Dame	W	33-20
Oct. 14	at Pittsburgh	L	21-38
Oct. 28	Duke	W	23-0
Nov. 4	Virginia Tech	W	34-3
Nov. 9	Virginia	W	31-24
Nov. 18	at Miami	W	38-31
Nov. 25	Kentucky	L	31-38
Dec. 2	vs. Florida State %	L	6-16
Dec. 27	vs. USC &	L	28-42

#Indianapolis %Charlotte &Holiday Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Austin Peay
Sept. 7	Jacksonville St.
Sept. 21	Georgia Tech
Sept. 28	at Notre Dame
Oct. 5	SMU
Oct. 12	at Virginia
Oct. 19	Miami
Oct. 25	at Boston College
Nov. 2	at Clemson
Nov. 16	at Stanford
Nov. 23	Pittsburgh
Nov. 30	at Kentucky

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Duke Watson, RB	★★★★
2.	Dylan Mesman, TE	★★★
3.	Fred Johnson, OL	★★★
4.	Maurice Davis, EDGE	★★★
5.	Isaac Brown, RB	★★★
6.	Deuce Adams, QB	★★★
7.	Joseph Stone, WR	★★★
8.	Xavier Porter, DL	★★★
9.	Shaun Boykins, WR	★★★
10.	Trent Carter, LB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Brohm • Record at School: 10-4 (1 year) • Career Record: 76-48 (10 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Brian Brohm Defensive Coordinators: Mark Hagen, Ron English • Location: Louisville, Ky. • Stadium: L&N Federal Credit Union Stadium (60,800)

Ashton Gillotte

SCOUTING THE CARDINALS

"Watch out for these guys; they were ahead of schedule last season and sneaked up on a lot of teams in our league. ... The offense is good, but it's not that level [Jeff] Brohm normally operates at. The quarterback play has been good and solid but never really great, so they brought in [Texas Tech transfer Tyler] Shough to take over the job. ... The defense really carried them at parts of last season. They're stronger than you think and play really physical. ... They don't get enough national attention. Brohm's back home, he knows that state and can recruit better talent to that place than Purdue. They can be just as good this year, especially if the offense opens up more."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	5	Caullin Lacy (Sr.)	86	Antonio Meeks (Jr.)
WR	0	**CHRIS BELL (JR.)**	2	Jadon Thompson (Sr.)
WR	1	Ja'Corey Brooks (Sr.)	7	Jimmy Calloway (Jr.)
LT	76	Jonathan Mendoza (Jr.)	70	Trevonte Sylvester (Jr.)
LG	68	**MICHAEL GONZALEZ (SR.)**	60	Rasheed Miller (Sr.)
C	50	Pete Nygra (Jr.)	59	Victor Cutler (Sr.)
RG	56	**RENATO BROWN (SR.)**	51	**AUSTIN COLLINS (JR.)**
RT	71	Monroe Mills (Jr.)	73	Madden Sanker (So.)
TE	84	Izayah Cummings (Sr.)	11	Jamari Johnson (So.)
QB	9	Tyler Shough (Sr.)	10	Pierce Clarkson (Fr.)
RB	4	Maurice Turner (Jr.)	21	Donald Chaney (Jr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	9	**ASHTON GILLOTTE (SR.)**	98	Adonijah Green (Fr.)
DT	99	**DEZMOND TELL (SR.)**	94	Jordan Guerad (Sr.)
DT	41	Ramon Puryear (Sr.)		Thor Griffith (Sr.)
DE	95	Mason Reiger (Sr.)	92	Micah Carter (Fr.)
LB	34	**TJ QUINN (JR.)**	32	Jurriente Davis (Sr.)
LB	6	Stanquan Clark (So.)	35	Antonio Watts (Jr.)
DB/LB	10	**BENJAMIN PERRY (JR.)**	12	Tamarion McDonald (Sr.)
CB	3	**QUINCY RILEY (SR.)**	4	Aaron Williams (Fr.)
CB	23	Tahveon Nicholson (Sr.)	14	Corey Thornton (Sr.)
S	27	**DEVIN NEAL (SR.)**	28	Daeh McCullough (Fr.)
S	26	**M.J. GRIFFIN (SR.)**	21	D'Angelo Hutchinson (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	38	Brock Travelstead (Sr.)	KR	4	Maurice Turner (Jr.)
P	93	Brady Hodges (Sr.)	PR	5	Caullin Lacy (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Scott Utterback/Courier Journal

Xavier Restrepo

SCOUTING THE HURRICANES

"It's a situation where the sum is not greater than the parts, and that falls directly on the head coach. There's more talent here, more resources, than the overall team you're getting. That's the problem right now. ... The Tyler Van Dyke experiment is over, and it's on them to fit their offense to Cam Ward, not the other way around. That kid has an established skill set that can help them, so they shouldn't try to make him accommodate their playbook. ... The defense is strongest to weakest from front to back. They're not as good in the secondary as they should be. ... The coaching issues cost them a game last season, and overall there are questions about how effective this staff is at getting the most out of otherwise talented players. The biggest question is the sidelines, not the roster."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	7	**XAVIER RESTREPO (SR.)**	5	Ray Ray Joseph (So.)
WR	3	**JACOLBY GEORGE (SR.)**	19	Ny Carr (Fr.)
WR		Sam Brown (Sr.)	2	Isaiah Horton (So.)
LT	64	**JALEN RIVERS (SR.)**	70	Markel Bell (Jr.)
LG	63	Samson Okunlola (Fr.)	52	Luis Cristobal Jr. (Sr.)
C	50	Zach Carpenter (Sr.)	76	Ryan Rodriguez (Jr.)
RG	73	**ANEZ COOPER (JR.)**	62	Tommy Kinsler IV (Fr.)
RT	61	**FRANCIS MAUIGOA (SO.)**	78	Matthew McCoy (So.)
TE	8	Elijah Arroyo (Jr.)	88	Riley Williams (So.)
QB	1	Cam Ward (Sr.)	16	Reese Poffenbarger (Jr.)
RB		Damien Martinez (Jr.)	4	Mark Fletcher Jr. (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	4	**RUEBEN BAIN JR. (SO.)**	11	Elijah Alston (Sr.)
DT	5	C.J. Clark (Sr.)	99	Ahmad Moten (So.)
DT	57	Marley Cook (Sr.)	8	Josh Horton (Fr.)
DE	3	**AKHEEM MESIDOR (SR.)**	11	Elijah Alston (Sr.)
LB	1	**FRANCISCO MAUIGOA (SR.)**	32	Raul Aguirre Jr. (So.)
LB		Jaylin Alderman (Jr.)	**31**	**WESLEY BISSAINTHE (JR.)**
CB		Dyoni Hill (Jr.)	6	Damari Brown (So.)
CB	2	**DARYL PORTER JR. (SR.)**	16	Robert Stafford (Fr.)
NB	0	Mishael Powell (Sr.)	23	Dylan Day (Fr.)
S	7	Jaden Harris (So.)	20	Zaquan Patterson (Fr.)
S	15	Markeith Williams (So.)	0	Mishael Powell (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	30	Andres Borregales (Sr.)	KR	7	Xavier Restrepo (Sr.)
P	94	Dylan Joyce (So.)	PR	5	Ray Ray Joseph (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Sam Navarro-USA TODAY Sports

MIAMI HURRICANES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 20 | ACC PREDICTION: 3 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 3-5 ACC

OFFENSE It begins with Washington State transfer quarterback Cam Ward, the prolific talent who chose Miami for his fifth and final collegiate season. Ward has thrown for 13,874 career yards and 119 touchdowns in two seasons at WSU and two at FCS Incarnate Word. UM also got the services of UAlbany transfer Reese Poffenbarger, who threw for 36 TDs and 3,603 yards in 2023 — the most of any FCS quarterback.

The offensive line, anchored by Freshman All-American Francis Mauigoa (RT) and NFL prospect Jalen Rivers (LT), should be top-notch. The receivers, led by slot standout Xavier Restrepo, are deeper and stronger, though UM's tight end corps sorely underachieved last season.

Ward's not the only West Coast headliner to choose the U. First-team All-Pac 12 running back Damien Martinez, the top-ranked back in the portal, arrives from Oregon State after rushing for 1,185 yards and nine TDs last season. He gives the Canes a bell-cow back to pair with Ward.

DEFENSE UM lost star safeties Kamren Kinchens and James Williams to the NFL Draft. The news is better at cornerback, where senior Daryl Porter Jr. , Marshall transfer Dyoni Hill and Washington transfer Mishael Powell (nickelback) are expected to start.

The Canes got a gift when middle linebacker Francisco Mauigoa, the older brother of Francis, returned for one more season. Mauigoa had 18 tackles for a loss, a team-leading 7.5 sacks (tied with Freshman All-America defensive end Rueben Bain Jr.), one interception, seven QB hurries and two forced fumbles.

The highlight up front: ACC Defensive Rookie of the Year Bain. And if veteran end Akheem Mesidor, who can also play tackle, gets back to form after surgeries on both feet, the Bain-Mesidor tandem should be tough to beat. UM will integrate transfers C.J. Clark (NC State) and Marley Cook (Middle Tennessee) into the tackle rotation.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Andre Borregales is undoubtedly among the nation's best. A 2023 first-team All-ACC selection, he also was a Lou Groza Award semifinalist. His older brother Jose won the award in 2020 for Miami. Second-year punter Dylan Joyce, an Australian, averaged 43.8 yards per punt last season. The top kickoff returner, Brashard Smith, transferred.

FINAL ANALYSIS For it to be 'All about the U' in 2024, it first must be all about Ward. An incredibly productive offseason in the portal has ratcheted up expectations as head coach Mario Cristobal enters his third season with a 12-13 record at his alma mater. This year could temper the criticism, or turn up the heat.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Florida
Sept. 7	Florida A&M
Sept. 14	Ball State
Sept. 21	at South Florida
Sept. 27	Virginia Tech
Oct. 5	at California
Oct. 19	at Louisville
Oct. 26	Florida State
Nov. 2	Duke
Nov. 9	at Georgia Tech
Nov. 23	Wake Forest
Nov. 30	at Syracuse

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 3-5 ACC)

Sept. 1	Miami (Ohio)	W	38-3
Sept. 9	Texas A&M	W	48-33
Sept. 14	Bethune-Cookman	W	48-7
Sept. 23	at Temple	W	41-7
Oct. 7	Georgia Tech	L	20-23
Oct. 14	at North Carolina	L	31-41
Oct. 21	Clemson (ot)	W	28-20
Oct. 28	Virginia (ot)	W	29-26
Nov. 4	at NC State	L	6-20
Nov. 11	at Florida State	L	20-27
Nov. 18	Louisville	L	31-38
Nov. 24	at Boston College	W	45-20
Dec. 28	vs. Rutgers #	L	24-31

#Pinstripe Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Marquise Lightfoot, EDGE	★★★★★
2.	Justin Scott, DL	★★★★★
3.	Jordan Lyle, RB	★★★★
4.	Armondo Blount, DL	★★★★
5.	Joshisa Trader, WR	★★★★
6.	Booker Pickett, EDGE	★★★★
7.	Ny Carr, WR	★★★★
8.	Ryan Mack, CB	★★★★
9.	Chance Robinson, WR	★★★★
10.	Adarius Hayes, LB	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mario Cristobal • Record at School: 12-13 (2 years) • Career Record: 74-73 (12+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Shannon Dawson • Defensive Coordinator: Lance Guidry • Location: Coral Gables, Fla.
Stadium: Hard Rock Stadium (65,326)

NORTH CAROLINA TAR HEELS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 45 | ACC PREDICTION: 8 | 2023 RECORD: 8-5, 4-4 ACC

OFFENSE The quarterback competition to replace Drake Maye could extend until just prior to the season opener, when Carolina travels to Minnesota. Conner Harrell moved up the depth chart the traditional way; he redshirted in 2022 and then appeared in five games in 2023, starting the Duke's Mayo Bowl against West Virginia after Maye opted out. Harrell flashed some potential in that game but also threw a pair of interceptions. His competition for the QB spot is well-traveled SEC transfer Max Johnson, who has spent time at both LSU and Texas A&M and has already started 22 games in his college career.

Whoever wins the job will have the luxury of handing off to Omarion Hampton, who was the Heels' most important retention in the transfer market. Hampton rushed for 1,504 yards and 15 touchdowns last season and was a finalist for the Doak Walker Award. Carolina has depth at the position with USC transfer Darwin Barlow.

The receiving corps will miss the departed Tez Walker, but in addition to veteran pass-catchers J.J. Jones, Gavin Blackwell and Nate McCollum, the Heels have two good weapons at tight end — Bryson Nesbit and John Copenhaver — to provide further receiving options.

DEFENSE Carolina's defense simply wasn't good enough last year. To fix things, head coach Mack Brown parted ways with longtime friend Gene Chizik and hired Geoff Collins as defensive coordinator. The former Georgia Tech head coach brings a different kind of energy to a group that had been overwhelmed with complicated terminology and assignments.

The headliner on defense is Jack end Kaimon Rucker, who is joined by Desmond Evans and Beau Atkinson, two ends with pass-rush potential. The depth is more uncertain on the interior of the defensive line, but Carolina added a big spring transfer in former Ole Miss tackle Joshua Harris.

A host of youngsters are competing to join Power Echols and Amare Campbell at linebacker. Cornerback Alijah Huzzie is the stalwart in the defensive backfield, where Jakeen Harris transferred from NC State and has a chance to play immediately.

SPECIALISTS Noah Burnette was second-team All-ACC last year after making 19-of-20 field goals and all 43 of his extra points. Huzzie had a punt return TD last year and provides big-play potential in the return game.

FINAL ANALYSIS Carolina's favorable schedule and capable offense mean the Tar Heels should be bowl eligible. Reaching loftier goals will require Collins to pay instant dividends with the defense.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	at Minnesota
Sept. 7	Charlotte
Sept. 14	NC Central
Sept. 21	James Madison
Sept. 28	at Duke
Oct. 5	Pittsburgh
Oct. 12	Georgia Tech
Oct. 26	at Virginia
Nov. 2	at Florida State
Nov. 16	Wake Forest
Nov. 23	at Boston College
Nov. 30	NC State

2023 RESULTS (8-5, 4-4 ACC)

Sept. 2	vs. South Carolina#	W	31-17
Sept. 9	App State (ot)	W	40-34
Sept. 16	Minnesota	W	31-13
Sept. 23	at Pittsburgh	W	41-24
Oct. 7	Syracuse	W	40-7
Oct. 14	Miami	W	41-31
Oct. 21	Virginia	L	27-31
Oct. 28	at Georgia Tech	L	42-46
Nov. 4	Campbell	W	59-7
Nov. 11	Duke (ot)	W	47-45
Nov. 18	at Clemson	L	20-31
Nov. 25	at NC State	L	20-39
Dec. 27	vs. West Virginia %	L	10-30

#Charlotte %Duke's Mayo Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Malcolm Ziglar, S	★★★★
2.	Jordan Shipp, WR	★★★★
3.	Jaiden Patterson, S	★★★★
4.	Alex Taylor, WR	★★★
5.	Javarius Green, WR	★★★
6.	Timothy Lawson, TE	★★★
7.	Ashton Woods, LB	★★★
8.	Jalon Thompson, S	★★★
9.	Jani Norwood, OL	★★★
10.	Desmond Jackson, OL	★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mack Brown • Record at School: 107-73-1 (15 years) • Career Record: 282-149-1 (35 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Chip Lindsey • Defensive Coordinator: Geoff Collins • Location: Chapel Hill, N.C.
Stadium: Kenan Memorial Stadium (50,500)

Omarion Hampton

SCOUTING THE TAR HEELS

"They've got a ton of questions; obviously they have to replace [Drake] Maye, and it's either going to be the backup who knows [Chip Lindsey's] offense [Conner Harrell], or [Max] Johnson, who is probably a better overall talent. The receivers are young, too. ... Defensively, they will look totally different. You can expect a lot of exotic looks and disguised pressures, and they'll fly around a lot more with the [Geoff] Collins scheme. ... Every year we're expecting Mack [Brown] to retire again, and every year they land a really good recruiting class and start reloading again. They've had some confusing assistant hires in his time, but credit him for elevating that brand in recruiting and matching the school's vision for football."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	5	**J.J. JONES (SR.)**	1	Jordan Shipp (Fr.)
WR	2	Gavin Blackwell (Jr.)	3	Chris Culliver (So.)
WR	8	Kobe Paysour (Jr.)	6	Nate McCollum (Sr.)
LT	76	Howard Sampson (So.)	69	Jarvis Hicks (So.)
LG	52	Jonathan Adorno (Sr.)	64	Malik McGowan (Jr.)
C	58	Austin Blaske (Sr.)	79	Bo Burkes (So.)
RG	53	**WILLIE LAMPKIN (SR.)**	55	Zach Rice (So.)
RT	78	Trevyon Green (So.)	73	Eli Sutton (Jr.)
TE	81	**JOHN COPENHAVER (SR.)**	18	Bryson Nesbit (Sr.)
QB	15	Conner Harrell (So.)	14	Max Johnson (Sr.)
RB	28	**OMARION HAMPTON (JR.)**	24	Darwin Barlow (Sr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	10	**DESMOND EVANS (SR.)**	12	Beau Atkinson (So.)
NT	98	**KEVIN HESTER JR. (SR.)**	4	Travis Shaw (Jr.)
DT	5	Jahvaree Ritzie (Sr.)	6	Joshua Harris (Sr.)
JACK	7	**KAIMON RUCKER (SR.)**	24	Mali Hamrick (So.)
MLB	23	**POWER ECHOLS (SR.)**	30	Michael Short (So.)
WLB	17	Amare Campbell (So.)	34	Caleb LeVallee (Fr.)
FCB	28	**ALIJAH HUZZIE (SR.)**	15	Tre Miller (Fr.)
BCB	29	**MARCUS ALLEN (JR.)**	9	Tyrane Stewart (Jr.)
STAR	16	**DEANDRE BOYKINS (JR.)**	21	Kaleb Cost (So.)
BS	1	Stick Lane (Sr.)	39	Major Byrd (So.)
FS	2	Jakeen Harris (Sr.)	31	Will Hardy (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	98	Noah Burnette (Sr.)	KR	3	Chris Culliver (So.)
P	96	Tom Maginness (Jr.)	PR	28	Alijah Huzzie (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Bob Donnan-USA TODAY Sports

Kevin Concepcion

SCOUTING THE WOLFPACK

[Quarterback] Grayson [McCall] transferring in means that they're going to push it to a win-now season. That kid is a born leader, a legit gamer. He's a success story for the portal; he stayed on at Coastal and gave them a full run, and now he gets a shot with a P4 program. ... Dave [Doeren] signing the extension was much deserved; that guy never gets the respect he deserves when you talk about elite head coaches. They turned a corner last year, especially when you go out recruiting and hear about that win over North Carolina. ... Is this year they put it all together? If you match McCall with that defense it might be. They've never had the breakout, conference title season in their history. This is a good chance."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	4	Dacari Collins (Jr.)	80	Terrell Anderson (Fr.)
WR	5	Noah Rogers (Fr.)	6	Wesley Grimes (Jr.)
WR	10	**KC CONCEPCION (SO.)**		Jonathan Paylor (Fr.)
WR	15	Justin Joly (Jr.)	11	Juice Vereen (So.)
LT	74	**ANTHONY BELTON (SR.)**	64	Rico Jackson (Fr.)
LG	75	**ANTHONY CARTER JR. (JR.)**	69	Dawson Jaramillo (Sr.)
C	56	Zeke Correll (Sr.)	55	Rylan Vann (So.)
RG	52	**TIMOTHY MCKAY (SR.)**	66	Matt McCabe (Jr.)
RT	65	**JACARRIUS PEAK (SO.)**	79	Kamen Smith (Fr.)
TE	87	Dante Daniels (Jr.)	49	Reid Mitchell (So.)
QB	2	Grayson McCall (Sr.)	16	CJ Bailey (Fr.)
RB	7	Jordan Waters (Sr.)	0	Kendrick Raphael (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	1	**DAVIN VANN (SR.)**	4	Red Hibbler (Sr.)
NT	44	Brandon Cleveland (Jr.)	99	DJ Jackson (So.)
DE	13	Travali Price (Jr.)	88	Isaiah Shirley (Fr.)
SLB	36	Kelvon McBride (Fr.)	34	Kamal Bonner (Fr.)
MLB	10	Caden Fordham (Jr.)	8	**DEVON BETTY (SR.)**
WLB	0	Sean Brown (Jr.)	34	Kamal Bonner (Fr.)
NB	16	Devon Marshall (Jr.)	15	Tamarcus Cooley (Fr.)
CB	3	**AYDAN WHITE (SR.)**	6	Corey Coley (Sr.)
CB	2	Brandon Cisse (So.)	22	Jackson Vick (So.)
SS	19	Bishop Fitzgerald (Sr.)	20	Daemon Fagan (Fr.)
FS		Donovan Kaufman (Sr.)	24	Zack Myers (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	94	Kanoah Vinesett (So.)	KR	8 Julian Gray (Jr.)
P	98	Caden Noonkester (Jr.)	PR	21 Jalen Coit (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Jim Dedmon-USA TODAY Sports

NC STATE WOLFPACK

NATIONAL FORECAST: 25 | ACC PREDICTION: 5 | 2023 RECORD: 9-4, 6-2 ACC

OFFENSE NC State's offense took some time to jell in Robert Anae's first year as the Wolfpack's coordinator in 2023, but the unit found its stride down the stretch of the season. The Red and White's offense outscored its opponents 144-77 during the team's five-game winning streak to close out the regular season.

Now, with a new quarterback in Coastal Carolina transfer Grayson McCall and an explosive group of receivers, the Wolfpack are primed to build off last season's success. Wideout Kevin "KC" Concepcion is back after winning the ACC's Rookie of the Year Award, and he will likely be the featured player yet again. But the Pack will not be a one-dimensional threat after adding Ohio State transfer wideout Noah Rogers along with Duke transfer running back Jordan Waters. NC State's offense will have a weapon on each level of the field, making it tough for defenses to defend just Concepcion in the slot.

DEFENSE The Wolfpack have big shoes to fill defensively after linebacker Payton Wilson departed for the NFL. The Bednarik and Butkus Award winner was a do-it-all defender for the Wolfpack.

While Wilson and his 138 total tackles — 17.5 for a loss — have departed Raleigh, NC State will have a somewhat new-look defense in terms of personnel. The Wolfpack will have a new trio of starting linebackers, while Brandon Cleveland will slide into the starting nose tackle spot. The secondary, which helped the Pack rank first in the ACC with 17 interceptions last year, returns standout corner Aydan White, but he is joined by a plethora of new faces on the back end.

SPECIALISTS NC State has turned into "Punter U" over the past few seasons, and Caden Noonkester appears to be on track to extend that reputation. He led the ACC with 71 punts for 3,022 yards, with 25 inside the 20-yard line and 11 longer than 50 yards last season. Kicker Kanoah Vinesett replaced Brayden Narveson and nailed a 48-yarder in the Wolfpack's spring game. He has one extra-point attempt — it was good — in his collegiate career. Long snapper Cade Davis will replace Joe Shimko, who was named the best at the position in the nation last year.

FINAL ANALYSIS With another year in Anae's offense and a group of new weapons, the Wolfpack appear primed to put up points at a high clip this season. The defense, which helped keep the Pack in games last year, could have some growing pains without Wilson anchoring the middle of the unit. If the defense finds its footing, NC State has the opportunity to compete for an ACC Championship Game appearance in 2024.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Western Carolina
Sept. 7	vs. Tennessee #
Sept. 14	Louisiana Tech
Sept. 21	at Clemson
Sept. 28	Northern Illinois
Oct. 5	Wake Forest
Oct. 12	Syracuse
Oct. 19	at California
Nov. 2	Stanford
Nov. 9	Duke
Nov. 21	at Georgia Tech
Nov. 30	at North Carolina

#Charlotte, NC

2023 RESULTS (9-4, 6-2 ACC)

Aug. 31	at Connecticut	W	24-14
Sept. 9	Notre Dame	L	24-45
Sept. 16	VMI	W	45-7
Sept. 22	at Virginia	W	24-21
Sept. 29	Louisville	L	10-13
Oct. 7	Marshall	W	48-41
Oct. 14	at Duke	L	3-24
Oct. 28	Clemson	W	24-17
Nov. 4	Miami	W	20-6
Nov. 11	at Wake Forest	W	26-6
Nov. 18	at Virginia Tech	W	35-28
Nov. 25	North Carolina	W	39-20
Dec. 28	vs. Kansas State #	L	19-28

#Pop-Tarts Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Terrell Anderson, WR	★★★★
2.	Trent Mitchell, OT	★★★★
3.	Duke Scott, RB	★★★★
4.	Elijah Groves, LB	★★★★
5.	Jonathan Paylor, WR	★★★★
6.	Tyler West, OL	★★★★
7.	CJ Bailey, QB	★★★
8.	Robby Martin, OL	★★★
9.	Joshua Ofor, LB	★★★
10.	Asaad Brown, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dave Doeren • Record at School: 81-58 (11 years) • Career Record: 104-62 (13 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Robert Anae • Defensive Coordinator: Tony Gibson • Location: Raleigh, N.C.
Stadium: Carter-Finley Stadium (56,919)

PITT PANTHERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 64 | ACC PREDICTION: 13 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 ACC

OFFENSE The quest for an impact quarterback enters Year 3 for Pitt. First-year starter Nate Yarnell looks to improve on the play of predecessors Kedon Slovis (2022) and Phil Jurkovec (2023), neither of whom fulfilled expectations. Yarnell, a 6-foot-6 junior, went 1-1 in two late-season starts, completing 66 percent of his passes for 595 yards with four touchdowns and one interception. Head coach Pat Narduzzi powerfully endorsed Yarnell as his QB1 entering spring drills yet seemed open to change upon observing freshman Alabama transfer Eli Holstein.

The quarterbacks could benefit from a revamped offensive staff that includes new coordinator Kade Bell, 31. Bell's spread/no-huddle system rated among the best in the FCS the past three seasons at Western Carolina.

Transfer wideouts Raphael Williams Jr. and Censere Lee played for Bell at WCU, the latter amassing 82 receptions for 1,426 yards with 14 touchdowns over the last two seasons. Others who could aid the passing game are Konata Mumpfield (44-576-5 in 2023) and under-utilized senior tight end Gavin Bartholomew.

Rodney Hammond Jr., the 2022 Sun Bowl MVP who ran for 547 yards in '23, leads a deep but inexperienced group of backs. The line, anchored by tackle Branson Taylor, returns four starters.

DEFENSE This group was among the most disappointing of the Narduzzi era, ranking 73rd in points allowed and plummeting from second to 27th in sacks. It will prove challenging to re-calibrate with the NFL departure of line coach Charlie Partridge and the post-spring transfers of two playmakers: end Dayon Hayes (10.5 tackles for a loss, four sacks in 2023) and linebacker Solomon DeShields (58 tackles, eight TFLs, two sacks). The losses leave the Panthers with only two returning starters.

Veteran coordinator Randy Bates must be creative in how he uses potential playmakers in safeties Cruce Brookins (a big hitter who raised eyebrows in the spring) and Javon McIntyre. Ditto for a young, athletic linebacking corps. Opponents will likely test the Pitt secondary early, given that the Panthers lost three NFL-caliber corners.

SPECIALISTS Need consistency? Better call Sauls. Senior kicker Ben Sauls is Pitt's active scoring leader with 171 points, including 31-of-40 on FG attempts. Caleb Junko is set to handle punting duties.

FINAL ANALYSIS Pitt's best hope is to successfully execute Bell's fast-paced offense to take pressure off an inexperienced defense. Narduzzi endeared himself to fans with a combined 20 victories in '21 and '22, but another losing season could turn Pittsburgh into "Boo City" — the name he coined after Jurkovec was jeered at Acrisure Stadium last fall.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Kent State
Sept. 7	at Cincinnati
Sept. 14	West Virginia
Sept. 21	Youngstown St.
Oct. 5	at North Carolina
Oct. 12	California
Oct. 24	Syracuse
Nov. 2	at SMU
Nov. 9	Virginia
Nov. 16	Clemson
Nov. 23	at Louisville
Nov. 30	at Boston College

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 ACC)

Sept. 2	Wofford	W	45-7
Sept. 9	Cincinnati	L	21-27
Sept. 16	at West Virginia	L	6-17
Sept. 23	North Carolina	L	24-41
Sept. 30	at Virginia Tech	L	21-38
Oct. 14	Louisville	W	38-21
Oct. 21	at Wake Forest	L	17-21
Oct. 28	at Notre Dame	L	7-58
Nov. 4	Florida State	L	7-24
Nov. 11	vs. Syracuse #	L	13-28
Nov. 16	Boston College	W	24-16
Nov. 25	at Duke	L	19-30

#Bronx

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Caleb Holmes, OL	★★★★
2.	Francis Brewu, DL	★★★
3.	Allen Bryant, CB	★★★
4.	Jeremiah Marcelin, LB	★★★
5.	Juelz Goff, RB	★★★
6.	Julian Dugger, QB	★★★
7.	Tyreek Robinson, WR	★★★
8.	Jiavani Cooley, OL	★★★
9.	Cameron Lindsey, LB	★★★
10.	Jahsear Whittington, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Pat Narduzzi • Record at School: 65-50 (9 years) • Career Record: 65-50 (9 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Kade Bell • Defensive Coordinator: Randy Bates • Location: Pittsburgh, Pa.
Stadium: Acrisure Stadium (68,400)

Konata Mumpfield

Charles LeClaire-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE PANTHERS

"It comes down to whether or not [Pat] Narduzzi is going to let [OC Kade] Bell run that offense and embrace change. That scheme goes fast — it's going to look a lot different than what they've put out previously. ... This team always has more potential than what's realized, and that's because of the offensive problems they've had, minus the one breakout year with [QB] Kenny [Pickett] and [former OC Mark] Whipple. They're always going to be a physical, disciplined defense, but in this league you've got to innovate on offense. This is a pretty easy team to read; either they're committed to making some changes on offense and seeing it through, or not."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	2	Kenny Johnson (So.)	83	Lamar Seymore (Fr.)
WR	9	**KONATA MUMPFIELD (SR.)**	20	Raphael Williams Jr. (Jr.)
WR	3	**DAEJON REYNOLDS (JR.)**	22	Lee Censere (Jr.)
LT	78	**BRANSON TAYLOR (SR.)**	74	Terrence Enos (Jr.)
LG	61	Ryan Jacoby (Sr.)	50	**JASON COLLIER JR. (SR.)**
C	58	**TERRENCE MOORE (JR.)**	56	Lyndon Cooper (Jr.)
RG	55	BJ Williams (So.)	72	Isaiah Montgomery (Soph.)
RT	70	**RYAN BAER (SO.)**	77	Jackson Brown (So.)
TE	86	**GAVIN BARTHOLOMEW (SR.)**	87	Jake Overman (Sr.)
QB	19	Nate Yarnell (Jr.)	10	Eli Holstein (Fr.)
RB	6	Rodney Hammond, Jr. (Sr.)	25	Desmond Reid (Jr.)

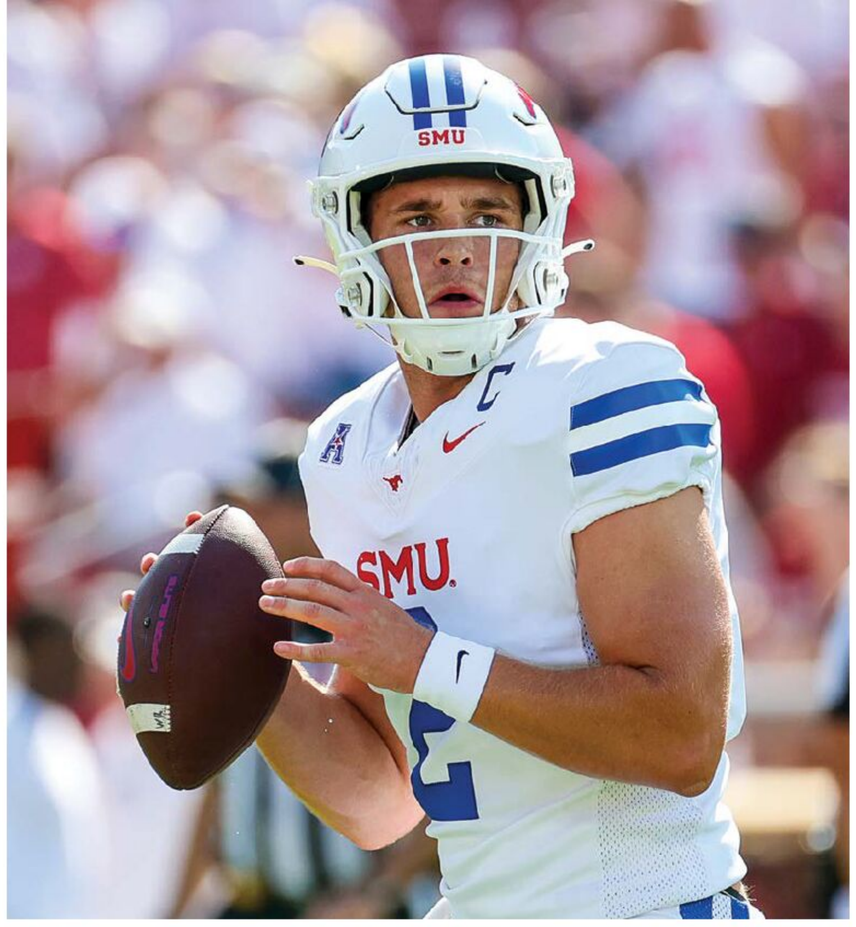
DEFENSE (2)

DE	43	David Ojiegbe (Fr.)	90	Sincere Edwards (Fr.)
DL	55	Sean FitzSimmons (So.)	57	Bam Brima (Sr.)
DL	96	Nick James (So.)	4	Nahki Johnson (Jr.)
DE	98	Nate Matlack (Sr.)	44	Jimmy Scott (So.)
LB	36	Keye Thompson (Sr.)	20	Jordan Bass (So.)
LB	30	Brandon George (Sr.)	35	Braylan Lovelace (So.)
LB	38	Kyle Louis (So.)	31	Rasheem Biles (So.)
CB	10	Ryland Gandy (So.)	28	Noah Biglow (Jr.)
SS	3	**DONOVAN McMILLON (SR.)**	34	Cruce Brookins (Fr.)
FS	7	**JAVON MCINTYRE (JR.)**	5	Phillip O'Brien Jr. (Sr.)
CB	15	Rashad Battle (Sr.)	25	Tamon Lynum (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	90	Ben Sauls (Jr.)	KR	9	Konata Mumpfield (Sr.)
P	91	Caleb Junko (Jr.)	PR	21	Che Nwabuko (So.)

Returning starters in ***BOLD***



Preston Stone

Kevin Jairaj-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE MUSTANGS

"These guys are ready for the ACC, honestly. This isn't a traditional G5 team moving up. They're P4 talented at the skill positions and have a great culture and identity. The biggest question here is how they'll handle defensive fronts. When you move up, it's really a measurement of your size and athleticism on the lines. Their OL isn't great, so that might be a concern. ... They were really improved on defense last year; it was really shocking how fast they got better under [defensive coordinator Scott] Symons, and most of those guys are coming back this season. Just like the offensive line, watch to see how they hold up up front, especially against the run."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	8	Jordan Hudson (Jr.)	3	**ROMELLO BRINSON (SR.)**
WR	9	Key'Shawn Smith (Sr.)	16	Ashton Cozart (Fr.)
WR	12	**JAKE BAILEY (SR.)**	13	Roderick Daniels Jr. (Sr.)
LT	59	PJ Williams (So.)	67	Sean Scott (Fr.)
LG	71	**LOGAN PARR (SR.)**	69	Nate Anderson (Jr.)
C	51	**JUSTIN OSBORNE (SR.)**	77	Alex Woods (Fr.)
RG	53	Jakai Clark (Sr.)	75	**BEN SPARKS (SR.)**
RT	54	Savion Byrd (Jr.)	72	Caleb Johnson (Jr.)
TE	81	**RJ MARYLAND (JR.)**	85	Adam Moore (So.)
QB	2	**PRESTON STONE (JR.)**	7	Kevin Jennings (So.)
RB	11	LJ Johnson Jr. (Jr.)	4	**JAYLAN KNIGHTON (SR.)**

DEFENSE (6)

DE	5	**ELIJAH ROBERTS (SR.)**	11	Je'lin Samuels (Jr.)
DT	9	Mike Lockhart (Sr.)	94	Jonathan Jefferson (Jr.)
NT	10	Anthony Booker Jr. (Sr.)	92	Kori Roberson (Sr.)
DE	6	Jahfari Harvey (Sr.)	58	Isaiah Smith (Jr.)
LB	34	**AHMAD WALKER (SR.)**	24	**KOBE WILSON (SR.)**
LB	54	Alexander Kilgore (So.)	29	Brandon Miyazono (So.)
CB	7	Deuce Harmon (Jr.)	13	Jaelyn Davis-Robinson (So.)
CB	14	AJ Davis (So.)	4	Jahari Rogers (Sr.)
NB	22	**CALE SANDERS JR. (SR.)**	1	Brandon Crossley (Sr.)
S	2	**JONATHAN MCGILL (SR.)**	3	Ahmaad Moses (Jr.)
S	12	**ISAIAH NWOKOBIA (JR.)**	21	Kyron Chambers (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	41	Collin Rogers (Jr.)	KR	1 Brashard Smith (Sr.)
P	49	Isaac Pearson (Jr.)	PR	13 Roderick Daniels Jr. (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

SMU MUSTANGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 31 | ACC PREDICTION: 7 | 2023 RECORD: 11-3, 8-0 AAC

OFFENSE Quarterback Preston Stone returns after leading the Mustangs to a 10-2 record as the starter and throwing 28 touchdown passes. His backup, Kevin Jennings, led SMU to an AAC Championship Game win and is more than capable of starting. Both are battling, but expect Stone to be under center as the Mustangs move to the ACC.

Running back has numerous options. Miami transfer Brashard Smith adds explosiveness to a room that lacked consistency in 2023. LJ Johnson Jr., Jaylan Knighton and Camar Wheaton are all potential contributors, but it's a position that's looking for someone to step up into a lead role. Same goes for wide receiver, where many expect Jordan Hudson to ascend to stardom in 2024. Possessing a true No. 1 wideout could allow this offense to hit its full potential this year. RJ Maryland is a top tight end nationally and a matchup problem.

Head coach Rhett Lashlee's offense saw starting offensive linemen Marcus Bryant, Branson Hickman and Hyrin White depart, but the program reloaded up front in the transfer portal and returns some experienced contributors as well.

DEFENSE The defense expects to be salty once again. After a top-15 finish nationally in yards per game allowed, defensive coordinator Scott Symons stayed in Dallas to lead this unit yet again. The defensive line is being retooled, but with potential All-ACC pick Elijah Roberts on the edge and a host of transfers, it could be better. If that's the case, a veteran linebacker group could improve. Alexander Kilgore is a sophomore who many believe could finish his career as one of the best linebackers in SMU history.

The cornerback room is a question having lost two starters, but the entire safety room is back with another year of experience in Symons' system. If SMU has a chance to make noise in the ACC early on, the defense will need to be the calling card of the program once again.

SPECIALISTS Returning placekicker in Collin Rogers was an all-conference pick last year. Punt returner Roderick Daniels Jr. is explosive, and SMU brought in Smith, one of the best kick returners in America, to beef up that unit. The Mustangs need to show improvement covering kicks, but overall, a bad unit in 2022 improved in a big way in 2023.

FINAL ANALYSIS Expectations are high, but making the move to the ACC could come with some lumps. That said, the Mustangs have the talent to open ACC play against Florida State sitting at 4-0. Quarterback play and the trenches will likely tell the tale of how high SMU's ceiling ultimately climbs. At minimum, bowl eligibility is what's expected.

2023 RESULTS (11-3, 8-0 AAC)

Sept. 2	Louisiana Tech	W	38-14
Sept. 9	at Oklahoma	L	11-28
Sept. 16	Prairie View	W	69-0
Sept. 23	at TCU	L	17-34
Sept. 30	Charlotte	W	34-16
Oct. 12	at East Carolina	W	31-10
Oct. 20	at Temple	W	55-0
Oct. 28	Tulsa	W	69-10
Nov. 4	at Rice	W	36-31
Nov. 10	North Texas	W	45-21
Nov. 18	at Memphis	W	38-34
Nov. 25	Navy	W	59-14
Dec. 2	at Tulane #	W	26-14
Dec. 28	vs. Boston College%	L	14-23

#AAC Championship %Fenway Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 24	at Nevada
Aug. 31	Houston Christian
Sept. 6	BYU
Sept. 21	TCU
Sept. 28	Florida State
Oct. 5	at Louisville
Oct. 19	at Stanford
Oct. 26	at Duke
Nov. 2	Pittsburgh
Nov. 16	Boston College
Nov. 23	at Virginia
Nov. 30	California

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Derrick McFall, WR	★★★
2.	William Nettles, CB	★★★
3.	Ka'Davion Dotson-Walker, S	★★★
4.	Brandon Booker, LB	★★★
5.	King Large, OL	★★★
6.	Jaylen Moses, S	★★★
7.	Alexander Rodgers, CB	★★★
8.	Tyler Aronson, QB	★★★
9.	Graham Uter, OL	★★★
10.	Zach Smith, LB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Rhett Lashlee • Record at School: 18-9 (2 years) • Career Record: 18-9 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Casey Woods Defensive Coordinator: Scott Symons • Location: Dallas, Texas • Stadium: Gerald J. Ford Stadium (32,000)

STANFORD CARDINAL

NATIONAL FORECAST: 79 | ACC PREDICTION: 17 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 2-7 PAC-12

OFFENSE The 2023 season marked the first year of a full-on rebuild for the Stanford Cardinal under head coach Troy Taylor. The roster was raided by the transfer portal after 2022, leaving him well below the scholarship threshold.

In 2024, Stanford boasts one of the best receivers in the country in Elic Ayomanor. The Canadian pass-catcher had a breakout game against Colorado, recording 13 catches for 294 yards and three scores and never looking back. Quarterback Ashton Daniels, who was the more utilized of the quarterbacks who played last season, will have to fend off 4-star recruit Elijah Brown for the gig by improving his decision-making and ability to create big plays.

The playbook will truly open up for Taylor and company if the offensive line improves. They allowed 41 sacks, and the rushing attack ranked No. 103 in the country with just 3.5 yards per carry. If they are unable to improve, it won't matter who is throwing to Ayomanor or his running mate Tiger Bachmeier. Nor will it matter which of the four young running backs headlined by Sedrick Irvin is toting the rock. But if the line does improve, the Cardinal's first year in the ACC should feature a better offense.

DEFENSE The defense was in even worse shape last season; just about every starter wasn't even in the two-deep the year prior. The unit ranked No. 129 in the country, allowing 461.7 yards, and allowed the most passing yards in the country.

However, the Cardinal return two playmakers at linebacker in Tristan Sinclair and Gaethan Bernadel. The secondary is headlined by Collin Wright, who could emerge as one of the better corners in the ACC.

Defensive coordinator Bobby April III has preached that this unit just needs to get back to the basics, and while trial by fire can be painful, it could also pay off.

SPECIALISTS Stanford lost kicker Josh Karty, who was arguably the most reliable kicker in the sport. He had a monster leg, which oftentimes meant that Stanford just needed to get across midfield to be in scoring position. His replacement will have some huge shoes to fill.

FINAL ANALYSIS Stanford has improved in all of the places it needed to, but the team is still a work in progress. The Cardinal are in the hoping-for-improvement stage, which means there will be some more growing pains. They should, however, be able to make a push for a bowl game, and they will have tons of players to be excited about in the future considering all of the talented youngsters they are bringing along.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	TCU
Sept. 7	Cal Poly
Sept. 20	at Syracuse
Sept. 28	at Clemson
Oct. 5	Virginia Tech
Oct. 12	at Notre Dame
Oct. 19	SMU
Oct. 26	Wake Forest
Nov. 2	at NC State
Nov. 16	Louisville
Nov. 23	at California
Nov. 30	at San Jose St.

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 2-7 PAC-12)

Sept. 1	at Hawaii	W	37-24
Sept. 9	at USC	L	10-56
Sept. 16	Sacramento State	L	23-30
Sept. 23	Arizona	L	20-21
Sept. 30	Oregon	L	6-42
Oct. 13	at Colorado (ot)	W	46-43
Oct. 21	UCLA	L	7-42
Oct. 28	Washington	L	33-42
Nov. 4	at Washington St.	W	10-7
Nov. 11	at Oregon State	L	17-62
Nov. 18	California	L	15-27
Nov. 25	Notre Dame	L	23-56

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Benedict Umeh, DL	★★★★
2.	Elijah Brown, QB	★★★
3.	Charlie Hoitink, OL	★★★
4.	Hayden Gunter, OT	★★★
5.	Dylan Stephenson, EDGE	★★★
6.	Maxwell Richardson, LB	★★★
7.	Chris Davis, RB	★★★
8.	Cole Tabb, RB	★★★
9.	Emmett Mosley, WR	★★★
10.	Ziron Brown, OL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Troy Taylor • Record at School: 3-9 (1 year) • Career Record: 33-17 (4 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Troy Taylor • Defensive Coordinator: Bobby April III • Location: Palo Alto, Calif.
Stadium: Stanford Stadium (50,424)

Elic Ayomanor

SCOUTING THE CARDINAL

"If you're buying low — and I mean real low — this is an interesting team to watch grow. They were pretty awful on the field last season under [Troy] Taylor, and they're stuck in this situation having to play across the country now, but they're recruiting really well, and recruiting to what they want to be. They jumped on a lot of guys early that most West Coast recruiters assumed they'd lose closer to National Signing Day, but they didn't really. They're rebuilding that program schematically and in personnel philosophy, and they're an ACC team now, so don't expect much, but you can see ROI on Taylor on the roster already."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (9)					
WR	13	**ELIC AYOMANOR (SO.)**	0	Mudia Reuben (Jr.)
WR	24	**TIGER BACHMEIER (SO.)**	83	Jackson Harris (So.)
WR	10	Emmett Mosley V (Fr.)	3	**BRYCE FARRELL (SR.)**
LT	78	Luke Baklenko (So.)	76	Jack Leyrer (Sr.)
LG	69	Jake Maikkula (Jr.)	61	**TREVOR MAYBERRY (SR.)**
C	57	**LEVI ROGERS (SR.)**	65	Allen Thomason (So.)
RG	55	**SIMIONE PALE (SO.)**	67	Fisher Anderson (Jr.)
RT	71	**CONNOR MCLAUGHLIN (SR.)**	73	Charlie Symonds (So.)
TE	86	**SAM ROUSH (JR.)**	46	Chico Holt (So.)
QB	14	**ASHTON DANIELS (JR.)**	2	Elijah Brown (Fr.)
RB	26	Sedrick Irvin (So.)	15	Ryan Buter (Jr.)
DEFENSE (7)				
OLB	14	Wilfredo Aybar (Sr.)	44	Ernest Cooper (Jr.)
DT	40	Tobin Phillips (Sr.)	97	Zach Rowell (Jr.)
DT	99	Benedict Umeh (Fr.)	94	**ANTHONY FRANKLIN (SR.)**
OLB	23	David Bailey (Jr.)	11	**TEVARUA TAFITI (JR.)**
ILB	8	**TRISTIN SINCLAIR (SR.)**	51	Sam Mattingly (Fr.)
ILB	0	**GAETHAN BERNADEL (SR.)**	35	Matt Rose (Jr.)
CB	6	**COLLIN WRIGHT (JR.)**	47	Caleb Ellis (Sr.)
CB	4	**ZAHRAN MANLEY (SR.)**	31	Aaron Morris (So.)
NB	17	Jshawn Frausto-Ramos (So.)	28	Cam Richardson (Fr.)
S	21	**SCOTTY EDWARDS (JR.)**	32	Mitch Leigber (Sr.)
S	5	Jay Green (Jr.)	22	Ché Ojarikre (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	13	Emmet Kenney (Jr.)	KR	3	Bryce Farrell (Sr.)
P	37	Aidan Flintoft (So.)	PR	3	Bryce Farrell (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Darren Yamashita-USA TODAY Sports

Oronde Gadsden II

SCOUTING THE ORANGE

"Really interesting to see how this rebuild goes, but the early returns are that this dude is crazy or fearless or both. They have to overhaul how Cuse is seen nationally as well as start winning battles in places like Jersey and Pennsylvania. ... [Kelly] McCord is a better quarterback than they've had in years; the question is if the OL can keep him intact. ... They've got a few studs on defense — the safety [Justin Barron] is a legit dude. ... I'm not sure if everything clicks right away, but they should be fighting for a bowl again this season and building in recruiting for next season. They're really rebranding the entire thing up there."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	2	Trebor Pena (Jr.)	82	Darrell Gill Jr. (So.)
WR	5	**UMARI HATCHER (JR.)**	83	Bryce Cohoon (Fr.)
WR	7	Jackson Meeks (Sr.)	8	Zeed Haynes (Fr.)
LT	71	**ENRIQUE CRUZ JR. (JR.)**	73	Joshua Miller (Fr.)
LG	74	**JAKOB BRADFORD (SR.)**	71	Lysander Moeolo (Jr.)
C	50	**J'ONRE REED (SR.)**	55	Josh Ilaoa (Sr.)
RG	72	**MARK PETRY (SR.)**	78	Joe Cruz (So.)
RT	57	Da'Metrius Weatherspoon (Jr.)	79	David Wohlabaugh Jr. (Jr.)
TE	19	**ORONDE GADSDEN II (JR.)**	89	**DAN VILLARI (JR.)**
QB	6	Kyle McCord (Sr.)	16	Carlos Del Rio-Wilson (Jr.)
RB	1	**LEQUINT ALLEN (JR.)**	23	Yasin Willis (Fr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	11	Denis Jaquez Jr. (Jr.)	9	Isaiah Hastings (So.)
DT	92	Rashard Perry (So.)	52	Braylen Ingraham (Sr.)
DT	99	Elijah Fuentes-Cundiff (Jr.)	94	Kevin Jobity Jr. (Jr.)
DE	10	Fadil Diggs (Sr.)	30	Chase Simmons (Jr.)
LB	15	**DEREK MCDONALD (JR.)**	12	Anwar Sparrow (Jr.)
LB	2	**MARLOWE WAX (SR.)**	6	James Heard (Fr.)
CB	7	Marcellus Barnes Jr. (Fr.)	23	Devin Grant (Jr.)
CB	1	**JAYDEN BELLAMY (SO.)**	32	Greg Delaine (So.)
S	5	**ALIJAH CLARK (SR.)**	26	Braheem Long Jr. (Fr.)
S	0	Duce Chestnut (Jr.)	29	Berry Buxton III (Jr.)
S	8	**JUSTIN BARRON (SR.)**	21	Jaeden Gould (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	15	Brady Denaburg (Jr.)	KR	2 Trebor Pena (Jr.)
P	41	Jack Stonehouse (Jr.)	PR	2 Trebor Pena (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Gregory Fisher-USA TODAY Sports

SYRACUSE ORANGE

NATIONAL FORECAST: 52 | ACC PREDICTION: 11 | 2023 RECORD: 6-7, 2-6 ACC

OFFENSE New head coach Fran Brown made a nearly immediate splash when he landed Ohio State transfer quarterback Kyle McCord. The Buckeyes' starter for 12 games last year, McCord will be tasked with leading an Orange offense equipped with some accomplished playmakers.

Running back LeQuint Allen is coming off a second-team All-ACC campaign in which he tallied 1,064 rushing yards and nine touchdowns to go with a team-high 38 receptions. Wideout Trebor Pena is a dynamic athlete with top-end speed and stop-start ability, as well as the versatility to line up across the formation. And another all-conference talent, tight end Oronde Gadsden II, was a matchup nightmare for opponents in 2022 before a Lisfranc injury ended his last season in Week 2 in 2023.

McCord, Brown and offensive coordinator Jeff Nixon must be prepared for the pressure that will inevitably come.

DEFENSE Another one of Brown's major moves was to hire Elijah Robinson as defensive coordinator. Robinson comes from Texas A&M, where he headed up a defense that finished in the top 20 nationally against the run in three of his six years leading the unit (2018, 2020, 2023).

The Orange have pivoted from a 3-3-5 to a 4-2-5 that places pass-rush onus on the trenches. Look for TAMU transfer end Fadil Diggs to take on a key role, both on the field and behind the scenes as a de facto coach.

SU returns more high-level production at the second level, where seniors Marlowe Wax and Derek McDonald have proven to be two of the ACC's most versatile linebackers.

And while SU has a couple of holes to plug on the perimeter, its safety trio of Duce Chestnut (who transferred back from LSU), Alijah Clark and Justin Barron have the athleticism, instincts and playmaking ability to erase some of the mistakes that will inevitably occur in front of them.

SPECIALISTS Punter Jack Stonehouse earned third-team All-ACC honors last year after logging the second-best net punting season in program history (44.6). Kicker Brady Denaburg was 10-of-16 on field goals in 2023, though three of his misses came from 50-plus yards. And Pena, despite missing most of last year due to injury, is one of the most experienced return men in the conference.

FINAL ANALYSIS Under the ACC's new scheduling format, divisions have been nixed, and so too have SU's annual meetings with Clemson, Florida State and NC State. It's a shift Brown could capitalize on to become bowl eligible in Year 1. Considering the team's veterans, key transfers and easier slate, it's not hard to see SU's path to a winning record in 2024.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Ohio
Sept. 7	Georgia Tech
Sept. 20	Stanford
Sept. 28	Holy Cross
Oct. 5	at UNLV
Oct. 12	at NC State
Oct. 24	at Pittsburgh
Nov. 2	Virginia Tech
Nov. 9	at Boston College
Nov. 16	at California
Nov. 23	Connecticut
Nov. 30	Miami

2023 RESULTS (6-7, 2-6 ACC)

Sept. 2	Colgate	W	65-0
Sept. 9	Western Michigan	W	48-7
Sept. 16	at Purdue	W	35-20
Sept. 23	Army	W	29-16
Sept. 30	Clemson	L	14-31
Oct. 7	at North Carolina	L	7-40
Oct. 14	at Florida State	L	3-41
Oct. 26	at Virginia Tech	L	10-38
Nov. 3	Boston College	L	10-17
Nov. 11	vs. Pittsburgh #	W	28-13
Nov. 18	at Georgia Tech	L	22-31
Nov. 25	Wake Forest	W	35-31
Dec. 21	vs. South Florida %	L	0-45

#Bronx %Boca Raton Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Emmanuel Ross, WR	★★★★
2.	Marcellus Barnes, CB	★★★★
3.	Michael Nwokocha, DL	★★★★
4.	Jamie Tremble, TE	★★★
5.	Jaylan Hornsby, WR	★★★
6.	KingJoseph Edwards, EDGE	★★★
7.	Jakhari Williams, QB	★★★
8.	Elijah Washington, TE	★★★
9.	Noah Rosahac, OT	★★★
10.	Ibn McDaniels, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Fran Brown • Record at School: First season • Career Record: First season
Offensive Coordinator: Jeff Nixon • Defensive Coordinator: Elijah Robinson • Location: Syracuse, N.Y.
Stadium: JMA Wireless Dome (49,057)

VIRGINIA CAVALIERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 72 | ACC PREDICTION: 16 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 ACC

OFFENSE The Cavaliers return two quarterbacks — Anthony Colandrea and Tony Muskett — who both started six games last season and showed flashes of promise in big-time wins but were not consistent enough. As he represents the future of the program, the rising sophomore and electrifying gunslinger Colandrea is expected to start over the experienced veteran Muskett. But at the very least, the Cavaliers have depth and insurance against injury at the most important position on the field.

The offensive line returns four starters and three other players with starting experience. Virginia again struggled to run the ball in 2023 (13th in the ACC) but will look to change that with a running back tandem of Kobe Pace and Xavier Brown, who shined as a freshman before missing most of last season due to injury.

Virginia had an effective passing attack that ranked fourth in the ACC at 250.8 yards per game, thanks largely to Malik Washington, who broke the program's single-season receiving records and is now headed to the NFL. UVA will look to replace Washington with transfers like Chris Tyree (Notre Dame) and Andre Greene Jr. (North Carolina), who join a solid group of returners led by Malachi Fields and JR Wilson.

DEFENSE Virginia ranked dead last in the ACC in scoring defense last season (33.8 ppg). One of the biggest problems was an ineffective pass rush, as the defensive line struggled with injuries most of the year. Virginia again brings back some experienced players on the front line, headlined by 2022 All-ACC selection Chico Bennett Jr. The front seven must improve in pass rush (last in the ACC in sacks in 2023) and run defense (12th at 184.5 rushing yards per game allowed).

Look for linebacker Kam Robinson and cornerback Dre Walker to take sophomore leaps after having very successful freshman campaigns. UVA reinforces its secondary with a few transfers and also gets sixth-year safety Antonio Clary back from injury.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Will Bettridge took a step forward as a sophomore, converting on 85.7 percent of his field goals, but punter Daniel Sparks took a step back, as his average fell by three yards and he had a few punts blocked. Tyree, who has more than 1,000 career kick return yards, will likely fill that role for the Cavaliers this season.

FINAL ANALYSIS Five of Virginia's nine losses last season came by single digits, and four of those were by three points or fewer. But wins and losses are all that matters. Virginia will need to perform much better in close games in order to take a step forward this season. Otherwise, head coach Tony Elliott might find himself on the hot seat by the end of 2024.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Richmond
Sept. 7	at Wake Forest
Sept. 14	Maryland
Sept. 21	at Coastal Carolina
Oct. 5	Boston College
Oct. 12	Louisville
Oct. 19	at Clemson
Oct. 26	North Carolina
Nov. 9	at Pittsburgh
Nov. 16	at Notre Dame
Nov. 23	SMU
Nov. 30	at Virginia Tech

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 ACC)

Sept. 2	vs. Tennessee #	L	13-49
Sept. 9	James Madison	L	35-36
Sept. 15	at Maryland	L	14-42
Sept. 22	NC State	L	21-24
Sept. 30	at Boston College	L	24-27
Oct. 7	William & Mary	W	27-13
Oct. 21	at North Carolina	W	31-27
Oct. 28	at Miami (ot)	L	26-29
Nov. 4	Georgia Tech	L	17-45
Nov. 9	at Louisville	L	24-31
Nov. 18	Duke	W	30-27
Nov. 25	Virginia Tech	L	17-55

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jewett Hayes, EDGE	★★★
2.	Tyler Simmons, DL	★★★
3.	Chase Morrison, EDGE	★★★
4.	Kevon Gray, CB	★★★
5.	Benjamin York, OT	★★★
6.	Keke Adams, S	★★★
7.	Triston Ward, WR	★★★
8.	Kameron Courtney, S	★★★
9.	Myles Brown, LB	★★★
10.	Dane Wleklinski, OT	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tony Elliott • Record at School: 6-16 (2 years) • Career Record: 6-16 (2 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Desmond Kitchings • Defensive Coordinator: John Rudzinski • Location: Charlottesville, Va.
Stadium: Scott Stadium (51,500)

Jonas Sanker

SCOUTING THE CAVALIERS

"They weren't as bad as 3-9 last season, but they have a lot of work to do if they're going to turn into a consistent winner. The recruiting hasn't been there yet, for whatever reason. It's a very hard to recruit in-state because out-of-state programs raid the top guys, and now Virginia Tech is cooking again. ... [Head coach Tony] Elliott pulled some really talented receivers in the portal; if they can pair them with a new quarterback, they could be decent. ... Defensively, they're just not very talented. They can't generate pressure up front, and you can push them around a lot. They're a year or two away at best, and they need the offense to carry them this season."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	4	Chris Tyree (Sr.)	1	Suderian Harrison (So.)
WR	8	**MALACHI FIELDS (SR.)**	2	Andre Greene Jr. (Jr.)
WR	17	JR Wilson (Jr.)	18	Jaden Gibson (So.)
LT	52	**MCKALE BOLEY (JR.)**	68	Jack Witmer (Sr.)
LG	77	**NOAH JOSEY (SR.)**	71	Ugonna Nnanna (Sr.)
C	55	**BRIAN STEVENS (SR.)**	53	Dawson Alters (Jr.)
RG	62	Drake Metcalf (Sr.)	51	**TY FURNISH (SR.)**
RT	54	Blake Steen (Jr.)	50	Jimmy Christ (Sr.)
TE	0	Sage Ennis (Sr.)	16	Tyler Neville (Sr.)
QB	10	Anthony Colandrea (So.)	11	Tony Muskett (Sr.)
RB	5	Kobe Pace (Sr.)	20	Xavier Brown (Jr.)

DEFENSE (8)

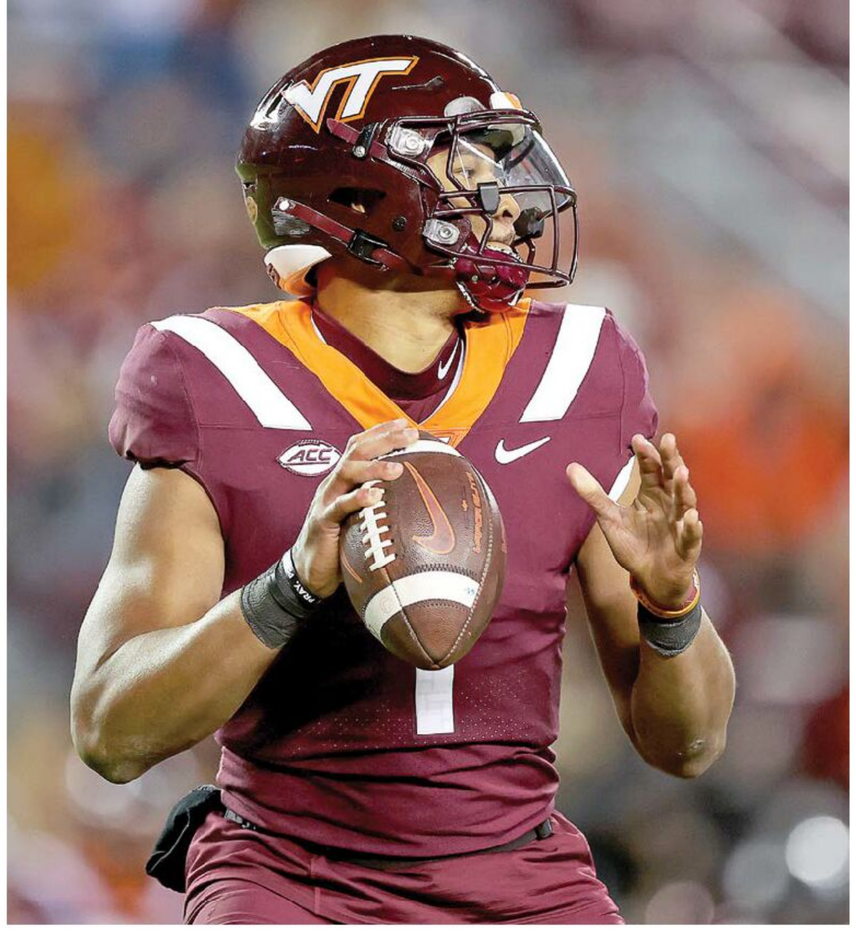
DE	82	**KAM BUTLER (SR.)**	10	**BEN SMILEY III (SR.)**
NT	90	**JAHMEER CARTER (SR.)**	91	Jason Hammond (So.)
DT	18	Michael Diatta (Sr.)	96	Bryce Carter (Sr.)
DE	15	**CHICO BENNETT JR. (SR.)**	11	Mekhi Buchanan (So.)
ILB	5	**KAM ROBINSON (SO.)**	16	Trey McDonald (Sr.)
ILB	7	**JAMES JACKSON (SR.)**	2	Stevie Bracey (Jr.)
LB/S	26	Caleb Hardy (So.)	3	Corey Thomas Jr. (Sr.)
CB	6	Dre Walker (So.)	4	Kendren Smith (Sr.)
CB	8	Malcolm Greene (Sr.)	29	Kempton Shine (Sr.)
SS	0	**ANTONIO CLARY (SR.)**	31	Micah Gaffney (Sr.)
FS	20	**JONAS SANKER (SR.)**	22	Elijah Gaines (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	41	Will Bettridge (Jr.)	KR	4	Chris Tyree (Sr.)
P	38	Daniel Sparks (Sr)	PR	26	Ethan Davies (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Jamie Rhodes-USA TODAY Sports



Kyron Drones

SCOUTING THE HOKIES

"No one's sure if they can go back to the old days, where Brent Pry is talking about 'being Clemson before Clemson,' but they're showing proof of concept already. Recruiting is better — they're still building out their state and the Carolinas — and the defense is the soul of the program. ... The offense finally clicked when they replaced [Grant] Wells with [Kyron] Drones, and now they can rally around him. He's a big, solid runner, and if they can improve on his field vision and slow some things down, they can take that next step. ... They're not in the class of an FSU or Clemson, but there's a good chance they're the best of the rest by season's end. Pry committed to the long-term rebuild here, and it's starting to show results."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (11)

WR	0	Ali Jennings Jr. (Sr.)	11	Tucker Holloway (Jr.)
WR	83	**JAYLIN LANE (SR.)**	26	Ayden Greene (So.)
WR	9	**DA'QUAN FELTON (SR.)**	12	**STEPHEN GOSNELL (SR.)**
LT	65	**XAVIER CHAPLIN (SO.)**	56	Layth Ghannam (Fr.)
LG	61	**BRAELIN MOORE (SO.)**	77	Brody Meadows (So.)
C	68	**KADEN MOORE (JR.)**	61	Braelin Moore (So.)
RG	66	Montavious Cunningham (Jr.)	75	**BOB SCHICK (SR.)**
RT	70	**PARKER CLEMENTS (SR.)**	79	Johnny Garrett (So.)
TE	86	**NICK GALLO (SR.)**	82	Benji Gosnell (So.)
QB	1	**KYRON DRONES (JR.)**	18	Pop Watson (Fr.)
RB	33	**BHAYSHUL TUTEN (SR.)**	24	Malachi Thomas (Jr.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE	52	**ANTWAUN POWELL-RYLAND (SR.)**	56	C.J. McCray (Sr.)
DT	16	Aeneas Peebles (Sr.)	22	Kelvin Gilliam Jr. (Jr.)
DT	13	Kemari Copeland (Jr.)	6	Josh Fuga (Sr.)
DE	17	**COLE NELSON (SR.)**	2	Keyshawn Burgos (Jr.)
MLB	3	Sam Brumfield (Sr.)	24	Jaden Keller (So.)
WLB	0	**KELI LAWSON (SO.)**	38	Jayden McDonald (Jr.)
STAR	7	**KEONTA JENKINS (SR.)**	20	Caleb Woodson (So.)
CB	44	**DORIAN STRONG (SR.)**	1	Dante Lovett (So.)
CB	4	**MANSOOR DELANE (JR.)**	8	Braylon Johnson (So.)
SS	26	**JALEN STROMAN (SR.)**	18	Mose Phillips III (So.)
FS	15	**JAYLEN JONES (SR.)**	21	Quentin Reddish (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	97	John Love (So.)	KR	33	Bhayshul Tuten (Sr.)
P	85	Peter Moore (Sr.)	PR	11	Tucker Holloway (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Peter Casey-USA TODAY Sports

VIRGINIA TECH HOKIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 27 | ACC PREDICTION: 6 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 5-3 ACC

OFFENSE The Hokies found something in quarterback Kyron Drones, who blossomed after taking over as the starter. The Baylor transfer accounted for 22 touchdowns in 11 starts, finally giving Virginia Tech a potential long-term answer at the position. He also reinvigorated the ground game with his dual-threat capabilities. Tech averaged 60 rushing yards per game before Drones became the starter and 213.4 after, with tailback Bhayshul Tuten (863 yards, 10 TDs) emerging as a workhorse.

The receiver room is as strong as it's ever been, with Ali Jennings returning from a knee injury to rejoin a veteran trio of Da'Quan Felton, Jaylin Lane and Stephen Gosnell that combined for 101 catches, 1,553 yards and 17 touchdowns.

The offensive line remains the biggest question mark, though it showed improvement in 2023. The group returns intact and adds Georgia State transfer Montavious Cunningham. If this unit hits, the offense could thrive.

DEFENSE Though the run game bedeviled the Hokies early on, the defense finished the year ranked in the top 20 nationally for the first time since 2017. The Hokies are especially strong in pass coverage, with Dorian Strong and Mansoor Delane forming arguably the best cornerback tandem in the ACC. Tech ranked fourth nationally in passing yards allowed (168.8 ypg). That went hand-in-hand with a revitalized pass rush that returns plenty of production after ranking second in the ACC with 39 sacks, led by edge rusher Antwaun Powell-Ryland (9.5 sacks).

The Hokies addressed their shortcomings via the portal. Defensive tackle transfers Aeneas Peebles (Duke), Kemari Copeland (Iowa Western CC) and Kelvin Gilliam Jr. (Oklahoma) have replenished the interior line, with Peebles already having an All-ACC nod on his résumé.

Tech hopes it solved its run-game issues by adding Sam Brumfield, a stout linebacker who led Middle Tennessee with 81 tackles in 2023.

SPECIALISTS The Hokies had top-10 kick and punt returners in Tuten (28.9 avg., two TDs on kickoffs) and Tucker Holloway (12.9 avg. on punt returns) for the first time in 20 years. Both are back, as is kicker John Love, who made 91.7 percent of his field goals.

FINAL ANALYSIS After a slow start, Virginia Tech turned a corner last season, getting back to a bowl and finishing above .500 in the ACC for the first time since 2019. Tech struggled against top teams last year, however, falling to Florida State, Louisville and NC State by a combined 108-48 margin. The Hokies have sleeper potential, but they'll need to prove they can beat top competition before anyone declares them ACC contenders.

2023 RESULTS

Aug. 31	at Vanderbilt	
Sept. 7	Marshall	
Sept. 14	at Old Dominion	
Sept. 21	Rutgers	
Sept. 27	at Miami	
Oct. 5	at Stanford	
Oct. 17	Boston College	
Oct. 26	Georgia Tech	
Nov. 2	at Syracuse	
Nov. 9	Clemson	
Nov. 23	at Duke	
Nov. 30	Virginia	

2024 SCHEDULE (7-6, 5-3 ACC)

Sept. 2	Old Dominion	W	36-17
Sept. 9	Purdue	L	17-24
Sept. 16	at Rutgers	L	16-35
Sept. 23	at Marshall	L	17-24
Sept. 30	Pittsburgh	W	38-21
Oct. 7	at Florida State	L	17-39
Oct. 14	Wake Forest	W	30-13
Oct. 26	Syracuse	W	38-10
Nov. 4	at Louisville	L	3-34
Nov. 11	at Boston College	W	48-22
Nov. 18	NC State	L	28-35
Nov. 25	at Virginia	W	55-17
Dec. 27	vs. Tulane #	W	41-20

#Military Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Keylen Adams, WR	★★★★
2.	Quentin Reddish, S	★★★★
3.	Gerard Johnson, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Gabriel Williams, LB	★★★★
5.	Chanz Wiggins, WR	★★★
6.	Joshua Clarke, CB	★★★
7.	Kemari Copeland, DL	★★★
8.	Tyler Mason, RB	★★★
9.	Deric Dandy, EDGE	★★★
10.	Emmett Laws, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brent Pry • Record at School: 10-14 (2 years) • Career Record: 10-14 (2 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Tyler Bowen • Defensive Coordinator: Chris Marve • Location: Blacksburg, Va.
Stadium: Lane Stadium (66,233)

WAKE FOREST DEMON DEACONS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 70 | ACC PREDICTION: 15 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 1-7 ACC

OFFENSE Wake Forest is entering its second transitional season in a row. Last season, the Deacons thought they had the pieces in place to keep humming along without Sam Hartman and A.T. Perry (among others). Instead, quarterback Mitch Griffis struggled and was benched, and Wake's offense had its worst season since 2015, which was the last time the program failed to reach a bowl game.

Discussing the latest recalibration starts at QB. That's likely to be Hank Bachmeier or Michael Kern, both in their sixth and final seasons of eligibility. Bachmeier is the more accomplished of the two (8,663 passing yards in five seasons at Boise State and Louisiana Tech), while Kern has been in Wake's system for five seasons.

They'll have a few weapons. Demond Claiborne is an explosive running back, while Taylor Morin has versatility as a receiver and will be in the slot. Wake Forest will benefit from the return of Donavon Greene, a key player two seasons ago who missed the 2021 and '23 seasons with injuries.

Wake's offensive line has to establish more continuity and consistency.

DEFENSE The record doesn't show it, and the numbers didn't hold up through a rough November, but Wake's defense made strides in Brad Lambert's second season as coordinator. The goal is to build on those.

There's returning experience and production in the front seven. Jasheen Davis is a budding star as an edge rusher, and linebacker Dylan Hazen was the team's leading tackler. Kevin Pointer anchors the interior.

The secondary is where there's work to be done. Nick Andersen and Evan Slocum are a decent foundation, and Davaughn Patterson and Rushaun Tongue showed promise as freshmen.

SPECIALISTS There's some work to be done in the kicking game. After making 12-of-14 field goals and 56-of-57 PATs in 2022, Matthew Dennis slumped to 14-of-20 FGs/20-of-21 PATs last year. He'll be pushed by Tyler Black, a strong kickoff specialist last season, and Caleb Carlson for the starting role. Ivan Mora enters his fifth season as Wake's punter and has been reliable. Wake's return game is potent with Morin and Claiborne on punts and kickoffs, respectively.

FINAL ANALYSIS Nobody expected Wake Forest to be atop the ACC last season; nobody expected the program to bottom out with a last-place finish, either. This year's attempt at a rebound is full of intrigue.

The bulk of the responsibility is probably on the offense. Assuming the defense stays on a positive trajectory under Lambert, the Deacons have to get back to scoring in bunches. And that means getting better QB play than it had last season. No matter who the starter is.

Jasheen Davis

SCOUTING THE DEMON DEACONS

"What you saw was very uncharacteristic for a [Dave] Clawson team last year. I would bet on an improvement this year regardless of the talent. He's a great head coach, and they have a solid system and culture. ... They had a really strong quarterback race going through the spring, and it will be interesting to see if any of those guys can pull away before September or if they'll try to rotate them. [Hank] Bachmeier was supposed to be the guy, but the freshman [Jeremy Hecklinski] looks really good, too. Based on the spring, they've got some work to do on defense and the offensive line, but if they can settle on a quarterback, they're going to be better than last season."

— An opposing ACC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	11	**DONAVON GREENE (JR.)**	86	Micah Mays Jr. (Fr.)
WR	5	Horatio Fields (Jr.)	4	Walker Merrill (Sr.)
WR	2	**TAYLOR MORIN (SR.)**	81	Deuce Alexander (Fr.)
LT	62	**DEVONTE GORDON (SR.)**	60	Uber Ajongo (Fr.)
LG	77	George Sell (Jr.)	73	Zach Vaughan (Jr.)
C	74	**LUKE PETITBON (JR.)**	54	**MATT GULBIN (JR.)**
RG	70	Nick Sharpe (Jr.)		Clinton Richard (Fr.)
RT		Keagan Trost (Sr.)	72	Erik Russell (Jr.)
TE	89	Harry Lodge (So.)	17	Michael Frogge (Jr.)
QB		Hank Bachmeier (Sr.)	15	Michael Kern (Sr.)
RB	23	Demond Claiborne (Jr.)	30	Tate Carney (So.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	30	**JASHEEN DAVIS (SR.)**	43	BJ Williams (Jr.)
DT	91	**KEVIN POINTER (SR.)**	95	Chris Marable Jr. (Fr.)
DT	44	Justin Cody (Sr.)	55	Bryce Ganious (Sr.)
DE	5	**KENDRON WAYMAN (SR.)**	46	Kerrington Lee (Fr.)
LB	24	**DYLAN HAZEN (JR.)**	39	Aiden Hall (So.)
LB	26	Quincy Bryant (Jr.)	18	Eldrick Robinson II (So.)
NB	22	Demarcus Rankin (Sr.)	29	Andre Hodge (So.)
CB	3	Capone Blue (Sr.)	27	Travon West (Fr.)
CB	25	Jamare Glasker (So.)	17	Zamari Stevenson (So.)
S	14	**EVAN SLOCUM (SR.)**	35	Rushaun Tongue (Fr.)
S	45	Nick Andersen (Jr.)	38	Davaughn Patterson (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Matthew Dennis (Jr.)	KR	23	Demond Claiborne (Jr.)
P	36	Ivan Mora (Sr.)	PR	2	Taylor Morin (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

2024 SCHEDULE		2023 RESULTS (4-8, 1-7 ACC)				TOP 10 RECRUITS*	
Aug. 29	North Carolina A&T	Aug. 31	Elon	W	37-17	1. Jeremiah Melvin, WR	★★★★
Sept. 7	Virginia	Sept. 9	Vanderbilt	W	36-20	2. Clinton Richard, OL	★★★
Sept. 14	Ole Miss	Sept. 16	at Old Dominion	W	27-24	3. Kendal Howard, DL	★★★
Sept. 28	Louisiana	Sept. 23	Georgia Tech	L	16-30	4. Sam Neely, CB	★★★
Oct. 5	at NC State	Oct. 7	at Clemson	L	12-17	5. Jacob Cosby-Mosley, S	★★★
Oct. 12	Clemson	Oct. 14	at Virginia Tech	L	13-30	6. Andrew Hines III, LB	★★★
Oct. 19	at Connecticut	Oct. 21	Pittsburgh	W	21-17	7. Jeremy Hecklinski, QB	★★★
Oct. 26	at Stanford	Oct. 28	Florida State	L	16-41	8. Camden Hardy, EDGE	★★★
Nov. 8	California	Nov. 2	at Duke	L	21-24	9. Whitman Whaley, LB	★★★
Nov. 16	at North Carolina	Nov. 11	NC State	L	6-26	10. Josh Harrison, EDGE	★★★
Nov. 23	at Miami	Nov. 18	at Notre Dame	L	7-45		
Nov. 30	Duke	Nov. 25	at Syracuse	L	31-35		

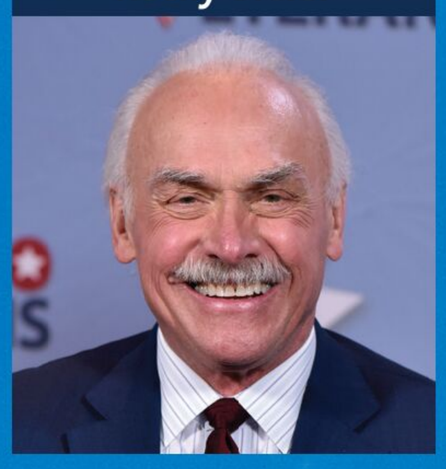
Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dave Clawson • Record at School: 63-61 (10 years) • Career Record: 153-141 (24 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Warren Ruggiero • Defensive Coordinator: Brad Lambert • Location: Winston-Salem, N.C. Stadium: Allegacy Federal Credit Union Stadium (31,500)

Jim Dedmon-USA TODAY Sports

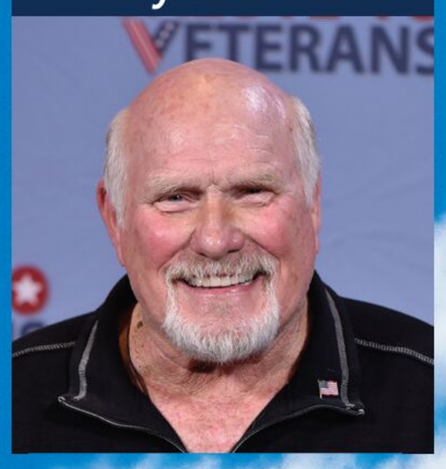
SALUTE TO VETERANS



★ Rocky Bleier ★

U.S. Army Veteran,
4-time Champion,
Pittsburgh

U.S.ARMY



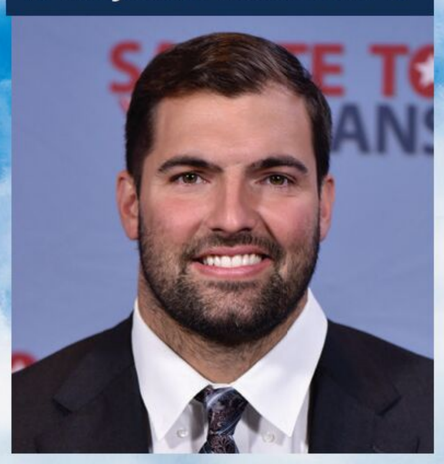
★ Terry Bradshaw ★

TV Host & Hall of Famer,
4-time Champion,
Pittsburgh

★ Greg Gadson ★

U.S. Army Veteran,
Honorary Captain,
2-time Champion with New York

U.S.ARMY



★ Alejandro Villanueva ★

U.S. Army Veteran,
2-time Pro Bowler,
Baltimore

U.S.ARMY

★ Joe Cardona ★

U.S. Navy Veteran,
2-time Champion,
New England

U.S. NAVY

Salute to Veterans is a national television series that honors and pays tribute to our nation's veterans, active duty service members, military families and patriotic supporters. The inspirational and educational program offers insightful discussion, resources and solutions for the ongoing issues our veterans face daily. The series shares the stories of distinguished veterans who have served their country, overcame personal challenges in their lives and made a difference in their communities, while inspiring others to do the same.

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U.S. VETERANS MAGAZINE

Defense One

Government Executive

PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1	**MEMPHIS**	TIGERS
2	**UTSA**	ROADRUNNERS
3	**SOUTH FLORIDA**	BULLS
4	**TULANE**	GREEN WAVE
5	**ARMY**	BLACK KNIGHTS
6	**RICE**	OWLS
7	**FLORIDA ATLANTIC**	OWLS
8	**EAST CAROLINA**	PIRATES
9	**NORTH TEXAS**	MEAN GREEN
10	**NAVY**	MIDSHIPMEN
11	**UAB**	BLAZERS
12	**TULSA**	GOLDEN HURRICANE
13	**CHARLOTTE**	49ERS
14	**TEMPLE**	OWLS

AAC CHAMPIONSHIP

MEMPHIS OVER UTSA

ALL AAC-TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	**Seth Henigan**	Memphis
RB	**Makai Hughes**	Tulane
RB	**Anthony Watkins**	Tulsa
AP	**Dean Connors**	Rice
WR	**Sean Atkins**	South Florida
WR	**Roc Taylor**	Memphis
WR	**Demeer Blankumsee**	Memphis
TE	**Oscar Cardenas**	UTSA
C	**Brady Wilson**	UAB
OL	**Xavier Hill**	Memphis
OL	**Gabe Blair**	North Texas
OL	**Rashad Green**	Tulane
OL	**Zane Herring**	South Florida

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	**Patrick Jenkins**	Tulane
DL	**D'Anta Johnson**	East Carolina
DL	**Brandon Brown**	UTSA
DL	**Chad Stephens**	East Carolina
LB	**Jesus Machado**	Tulane
LB	**Colin Ramos**	Navy
LB	**Chandler Martin**	Memphis
LB	**Jamal Ligon**	UTSA
CB	**Shavon Revel**	East Carolina
CB	**Dontae Balfour**	Charlotte
S	**Rayuan Lane**	Navy
S	**Gabriel Taylor**	Rice

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	Chase Allen	UTSA
P	Riley Reithman	Navy
KR	Sutton Smith	Memphis
PR	Henry Rutledge	Charlotte

AS For a look at second- and third-team selections, visit *AthlonSports.com*

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Armed Forces: UTSA vs. Iowa State

Birmingham: Tulane vs. South Carolina

Cure: Memphis vs. Miami (Ohio)

Fenway: South Florida vs. Georgia Tech

Frisco: Rice vs. Wyoming

Independence: Army vs. Oregon State

Military: East Carolina vs. Syracuse

Myrtle Beach: Florida Atlantic vs. James Madison

Seth Henigan, Memphis

COACHING CAROUSEL

ARMY
Offense: New: Cody Worley; Old: Drew Thatcher

EAST CAROLINA
Offense: New: John David Baker; Old: Donnie Kirkpatrick

MEMPHIS
Offense: New: Tim Cramsey, Larry Smith; Old: Tim Cramsey
Defense: New: Jordon Hankins, Spence Nowinsky; Old: Matt Barnes

NAVY
Offense: New: Drew Cronic; Old: Grant Chestnut

TULANE
Head Coach: New: Jon Sumrall; Old: Willie Fritz
Offense: New: Joe Craddock, Evan McKissack; Old: Slade Nagle
Defense: New: Greg Gasparato, Tayler Polk; Old: Shiel Wood

AAC RETURNING LEADERS

PASSING	ATT	COMP	PCT	YDS	TD	INT	AVG/G
E.J. Warner*, Temple	445	256	57.5	3,076	23	12	307.6
Seth Henigan, Memphis	476	318	66.8	3,883	32	9	298.7
Jacob Zeno, UAB	379	279	73.6	3,126	20	9	284.2

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Makhi Hughes, Tulane	258	1,378	5.3	7	58	98.4
Bryson Daily, Army	215	964	4.2	7	62	81.9
Anthony Watkins, Tulsa	197	889	4.5	4	46	74.1

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Roc Taylor, Memphis	69	1,083	15.7	4	85	83.3
Sean Atkins, South Florida	92	1,054	11.5	7	88	81.1
Demeer Blankumsee, Memphis	53	901	17.0	7	70	69.3

DEFENSE

TACKLES
Colin Ramos, Navy (110); Jesus Machado, Tulane (98)

SACKS
Desmond Little, UAB (6.0); Patrick Jenkins, Tulane (5.5)

INTERCEPTIONS
Dashaun Peele, Navy (4); Rayuan Lane, Navy (4)

**Warner transferred to Rice in the offseason*

GAMES TO WATCH

SEPT. 7 UTSA at Texas State
SEPT. 7 Kansas State at Tulane
SEPT. 14 Rice at Houston
SEPT. 28 South Florida at Tulane
OCT. 5 Navy at Air Force
OCT. 11 Memphis at South Florida
OCT. 12 UTSA at Rice
NOV. 1 South Florida at Florida Atlantic
NOV. 2 Memphis at UTSA
NOV. 2 Air Force at Army
NOV. 28 Memphis at Tulane
DEC. 14 Army vs. Navy (Landover, MD)

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. South Florida (57)
2. Tulsa (62)
3. Tulane (69)
4. Memphis (71)
5. East Carolina (79)
6. Charlotte (84)
7. North Texas (90)
8. FAU (91)
9. Temple (94)
10. UAB (96)
11. UTSA (108)
12. Rice (116)
13. Navy (131)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Jonathan Echols	TE	South Florida	★★★★	348
2.	Jonah Miller	OT	UTSA	★★★	17*
3.	Keonde Henry	WR	Memphis	★★★★	372
4.	Jayden Lewis	CB	Tulane	★★★	447
5.	Jonathan Young	OT	Memphis	★★★	33*
6.	Fred Gaskin III	S	South Florida	★★★	531
7.	Yannick Smith	WR	East Carolina	★★★	572
8.	DeGabriel Floyd		Charlotte	★★★	50*
9.	Zycarl Lewis	WR	Tulane	★★★	646
10.	Alex Green	WR	Tulsa	★★★	716

**Junior college transfer/juco ranking*

Chris Day/The Commercial Appeal

ARMY BLACK KNIGHTS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 90 | AAC PREDICTION: 5 | 2023 RECORD: 6-6

OFFENSE Prior to last season, Army looked to change things up from its traditional under-center option offense and work in more passing and shotgun formations. It didn't have the results that head coach Jeff Monken hoped for, and he returned to the more traditional looks in the latter weeks of the season. Army won four straight to finish 6-6, and offensive coordinator Drew Thatcher was replaced by Cody Worley in the offseason.

Thanks to that traditional style, the Black Knights were once again near the top of FBS in terms of time of possession, averaging 32 minutes per game. That typically leaves opposing offenses minimal room for error if they're only getting about eight possessions or fewer per game.

First-year starting quarterback Bryson Daily made waves throughout the year, finishing as the team's leading rusher with 901 yards and seven touchdowns on the ground. Daily also threw seven touchdown passes with six interceptions. The senior returns to lead the offense in 2024 with another strong backfield headlined by veteran Tyrell Robinson and talented sophomore Kanye Udoh.

DEFENSE Longtime defensive coordinator Nate Woody had the Black Knights' defense playing its best football in the final four games of the 2023 season. After forcing eight turnovers through the first eight weeks, the Knights generated 11 in those last four contests, including six against Air Force and two against Navy. In that Navy win, linebacker Kalib Fortner was named the MVP after returning a fumble 44 yards for a touchdown. The Tennessee native will be a key contributor again after showing his incredible value last year as a sophomore.

Another leader of the defense will be senior safety Max DiDomenico. Last season, DiDomenico had 53 tackles with two interceptions and a forced fumble, including an interception in the win over Navy that clinched the Commander-In-Chief's Trophy.

SPECIALISTS In the return game, the sure-handed Robinson is the primary guy, but expect multiple players to once again help out in that aspect. The Army punt team was very solid in 2023 with just one touchback and two blocks on 44 attempts. Junior placekicker Charlie Barnett will see his role increase thanks to the graduation of Cole Talley and Quinn Maretzki.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Black Knights' first season in the American Athletic Conference should be interesting. Their brand of option football found a groove at the end of last season. While concerns about the long-term effectiveness of that strategy are still there, their current personnel have shown that they're comfortable with that approach. They may not contend for the AAC title, but they may be the top service academy once again.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	Lehigh
Sept. 7	at Florida Atlantic
Sept. 21	Rice
Sept. 26	at Temple
Oct. 5	at Tulsa
Oct. 12	UAB
Oct. 19	East Carolina
Nov. 2	Air Force
Nov. 9	at North Texas
Nov. 23	vs. Notre Dame #
Nov. 30	UTSA
Dec. 14	vs. Navy %

#Bronx, NY %Landover, MD

2023 RESULTS (6-6)

Sept. 2	at ULM	L	13-17
Sept. 9	Delaware State	W	57-0
Sept. 15	at UTSA	W	37-29
Sept. 23	at Syracuse	L	16-29
Oct. 7	Boston College	L	24-27
Oct. 14	Troy	L	0-19
Oct. 21	at LSU	L	0-62
Oct. 28	Massachusetts	L	14-21
Nov. 4	vs. Air Force #	W	23-3
Nov. 11	Holy Cross	W	17-14
Nov. 18	Coastal Carolina	W	28-21
Dec. 9	vs. Navy %	W	17-11

#Denver %Foxborough

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Justin Ruffin, CB	★★★
2.	Conall Brannan, TE	★★★
3.	Will Brockmeier, EDGE	★★★
4.	Bryce Jaworski, OL	★★★
5.	Dylan Armentrout, RB	★★★
6.	Ryan Vanscoy, TE	★★★
7.	Jayden Antonelli, EDGE	★★★
8.	Brian Ray III, WR	★★★
9.	Abram Edwards, TE	★★★
10.	Jack Kayser, RB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Monken • Record at School: 70-55 (10 years) • Career Record: 106-71 (14 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Cody Worley • Defensive Coordinator: Nate Woody • Location: West Point, N.Y.
Stadium: Michie Stadium (38,000)

Bryson Daily

SCOUTING THE BLACK KNIGHTS

"It's pretty crazy, even for a service academy — you usually don't see that kind of season where you make a big deal in public about changing your offense and installing something different, and then you bail on it when it's not clicking. That's not saying they were wrong to go back to more flexbone; there's a limit to what they can do, but it wasn't really broken, you know? This is the better program between Army and Navy these last few years, but the transition to the American will be interesting. It's going to be a much harder schedule and a more physical toll on them."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	80	Liam Fortner (Jr.)	81	Tobi Olawole (So.)
WR	87	Casey Reynolds (Sr.)	**15**	**NOAH SHORT (JR.)**
LT	70	David Hoyt (Sr.)	77	Jordyn Law (Sr.)
LG	53	Bill Katsigiannis (Sr.)	59	Will Jeffcoat (Sr.)
C	**51**	**BRADY SMALL (SO.)**	56	Tyler Lee (So.)
RG	**65**	**LUCAS SCOTT (SR.)**	54	Tanner Bivins (Jr.)
RT	69	Matthew Adoghe (Sr.)	73	Ned Brady (Jr.)
TE	86	Will Montesi (Sr.)	85	David Crossan (Sr.)
QB	**13**	**BRYSON DAILY (SR.)**	1	Zach Mundell (Jr.)
RB	26	Kanye Udoh (So.)	22	Miles Stewart (Sr.)
RB	21	Tyrell Robinson (Sr.)	42	AJ Williams (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	92	Jack Latore (Jr.)	98	Deshontez Gray (Jr.)
DT	**95**	**KYLE LEWIS (SR.)**	97	Dre Miller (Sr.)
DE	94	Jacob Tuioti (Jr.)	48	Tyler Deleon (Jr.)
ILB	36	Brett Gerena (Sr.)	29	Adam Cash (Sr.)
ILB	**53**	**KALIB FORTNER (JR.)**	51	Andon Thomas (Jr.)
OLB	91	Trey Sofia (Sr.)	40	Eric Ford (Jr.)
OLB	23	Chance Keith (Sr.)	18	Elo Modozie (So.)
CB	25	Josiah Banks (Sr.)	28	Donavon Platt (Jr.)
CB	16	Damon Washington (Sr.)	43	Hamilton Baker (Sr.)
S	9	Aaron Bibbins (Sr.)	11	Tommy Zitiello (Sr.)
S	**6**	**MAX DIDOMENICO (SR.)**	20	Casey Larkin (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	7	Charlie Barnett (Jr.)	KR	21	Tyrell Robinson (Sr.)
P	38	Cooper Allan (Jr.)	PR	21	Tyrell Robinson (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Danny Wild-USA TODAY Sports

Jairus Mack

SCOUTING THE 49ERS

"It's really hard to know what to expect here because they're turning over the roster as much as they can. They have a lot of guys from the Baltimore area where [head coach Biff Poggi] is from. ... Biff is committed to a wholesale rebuild, and they've brought in a ton of guys... The offense is supposedly changing to a more downfield passing attack with the Florida quarterback [Max Brown] and they're reworking their receiving corps. ... Biff has shown some promising returns for them early on, at least in recruiting, but the next step is to create something on the field so they can build on it."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	4	Justin Olson (Sr.)	83	Sean Brown (Sr.)
WR	3	**JAIRUS MACK (JR.)**	13	Malik Baker II (So.)
WR	10	**DUANE THOMAS JR. (SO.)**	22	Jack Reynolds (Jr.)
LT	79	Jordan Herman (So.)	53	Kendall Stanley (So.)
LG	66	Jordan Moko (Jr.)	56	Andrew Adair (Jr.)
C	52	**JONNY KING (SR.)**	76	Isaiah Bullerdick (So.)
RG	55	Mo Clipper Jr. (So.)	65	Boston Brinkley (So.)
RT	77	Mitchell Mayes (Sr.)	53	Kendall Stanley (So.)
TE	81	**JAKE CLEMONS (SR.)**	18	Colin Weber (Jr.)
QB	1	Max Brown (So.)	11	Trexler Ivey (So.)
RB	8	Cartevious Norton (Jr.)	0	Terron Kellman (So.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	3	Demon Clowney (Sr.)	18	Zion Shockley (So.)
DT	99	Dre Martin (So.)	94	Jonathan Wallace (Jr.)
DT	71	Dre Butler (Sr.)	90	**DEZ MORGAN (SR.)**
DE	11	Stone Handy (Sr.)	19	Donovan Spellman (Jr.)
OLB	10	Ositadinma Ekwonu (Sr.)	8	Cam Burden (Jr.)
MLB	25	Prince Bemah (Sr.)	26	Xavier Simmons (So.)
OLB	39	Aidan Kaler (Sr.)	40	Reid Williford (So.)
CB	7	Anthony Romphf (Jr.)	45	Jaavan Mack (Jr.)
CB	1	**DONTAE BALFOUR (JR.)**	30	Derrick Edwards (Jr.)
S	6	Al-Ma'hi Ali (Jr.)	2	Treyveon McGee (Sr.)
S	16	Kameron Howard (So.)	29	Maguire Neal (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	44	Hunter Patrick (Sr.)	KR	21 Henry Rutledge (So.)
P	96	Michael O'Shaughnessy (Sr.)	PR	21 Henry Rutledge (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Charlotte Athletics

CHARLOTTE 49ERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 126 | AAC PREDICTION: 13 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 AAC

OFFENSE The 49ers struggled to score points in 2023, averaging only 17.5 per game. They narrowly avoided being the lowest-scoring team in the American Athletic Conference, outscoring last-place East Carolina by only two points.

The passing attack was particularly ineffective, with 16 interceptions compared to only seven passing touchdowns. But help has arrived in the form of Florida transfer quarterback Max Brown. Brown completed 19-of-28 passes for 192 yards and an interception in six appearances for the Gators last season, including a start against Florida State. Brown is one of 22 incoming transfers this season.

Running back Cartevious Norton, who spent the previous two seasons at Iowa State, also looks to make an immediate impact. He averaged a shade under four yards per carry last season as a sophomore with the Cyclones. Charlotte's rushing production was all over the place last season. For instance, the 49ers ran for 223 yards and five touchdowns against Memphis, but just 84 yards the very next week vs. Rice.

DEFENSE The 49ers were respectable defensively last season, allowing 374 yards per game and 213 passing yards per game, a number that ranked in the top half of the AAC. They also posted a respectable interception count of 11.

In terms of returning talent, cornerback Dontae Balfour was a third-team All-AAC selection.He tied school records for pass breakups in a season (11) and in a game (four) in his first year with the 49ers after transferring in from North Carolina. Several other defensive backs will play their first season with the 49ers this season, including former Louisville safety Derrick Edwards, who arrives with three years of ACC experience.

SPECIALISTS Speedy kick returner Henry Rutledge is a threat every time he touches the ball. He was one of only four players in the American to return a punt for a touchdown last season and led the AAC with an average of 11.9 yards per punt return. Kicker Hunter Patrick, now on his third college team after graduating summa cum laude from Coastal Carolina, could see his first college action in 2024.

FINAL ANALYSIS Last season, head coach Biff Poggi predicted his team would win the AAC. To put it mildly, they failed in that quest at 3-9. Perhaps approaching this season with a more realistic mindset will benefit the 49ers and get them one step closer to a bowl game. It's going to take some major improvement in all phases of the game and a big reduction in penalties after 84 last season.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	James Madison
Sept. 7	at North Carolina
Sept. 14	Gardner-Webb
Sept. 21	at Indiana
Sept. 28	at Rice
Oct. 5	East Carolina
Oct. 19	at Navy
Oct. 26	at Memphis
Oct. 31	Tulane
Nov. 16	South Florida
Nov. 23	at Florida Atlantic
Nov. 30	UAB

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 AAC)

Sept. 2	South Carolina St.	W	24-3
Sept. 9	at Maryland	L	20-38
Sept. 16	Georgia State	L	25-41
Sept. 23	at Florida	L	7-22
Sept. 30	at SMU	L	16-34
Oct. 14	Navy	L	0-14
Oct. 21	at East Carolina	W	10-7
Oct. 27	Florida Atlantic	L	16-38
Nov. 4	at Tulsa (ot)	W	33-26
Nov. 11	Memphis (ot)	L	38-44
Nov. 18	Rice	L	7-28
Nov. 25	at South Florida	L	14-48

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	De'Gabriel Floyd, ATH	★★★
2.	Rod Gainey Jr., RB	★★★
3.	Evan Austin, ATH	★★★
4.	Tre McLeod, RB	★★★
5.	Isaiah Myers, WR	★★★
6.	Miles Burris, WR	★★★
7.	Kainoa Davis, DL	★★★
8.	Deshawn Purdie, QB	★★★
9.	Jonathan Okate, LB	★★★
10.	Umar Rockhead, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Biff Poggi • Record at School: 3-9 (1 year) • Career Record: 3-9 (1 year)
Offensive Coordinator: Mike Miller • Defensive Coordinator: Ryan Osborn • Location: Charlotte, N.C.
Stadium: Jerry Richardson Stadium (15,314)

EAST CAROLINA PIRATES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 99 | AAC PREDICTION: 8 | 2023 RECORD: 2-10, 1-7 AAC

OFFENSE No one thing cemented the Pirates' fate as one of the worst teams in FBS last season. However, the severe lack of points certainly contributed.

The Pirates scored a league-low 22 touchdowns last season and mustered only 17.3 points per game, ranking them in the bottom five in FBS. They failed to score more than 10 points on five separate occasions, including a 10-0 loss to Navy in the second-to-last week of the season.

Quarterback play certainly played a part, with departed QB Alex Flinn throwing 12 interceptions compared to six touchdowns. To help correct that, Mike Houston's staff signed two former Power 5 quarterbacks in Missouri's Jake Garcia and Michigan State's Katin Houser.

DEFENSE For what it's worth, ECU's defense was definitely the stronger side of the ball in 2023. ECU allowed opponents an average of 5.2 yards per play last season, ranking just behind Tulane among teams returning to the AAC in 2024.

Up front, the depth of ECU's defensive line is exceptional. However, the Pirates' pass rush generated only 18 sacks last season. Returning veterans like Chad Stephens and newcomers like Louisville transfer Ryheem Craig alike will need to help correct that deficiency. Redshirt senior D'Anta Johnson was an All-AAC selection last season with four sacks and 9.5 tackles for a loss. Ohio State graduate transfer Jaden McKenzie also adds an interesting element to that position group.

Another name that could be of interest to NFL Draft fans this season is senior cornerback Shavon Revel, a playmaking machine. The 6-foot-3, 185-pounder was a second-team All-AAC selection last season. He totaled 54 tackles with 3.5 for a loss along with an interception and a fumble return for a touchdown. He broke up 12 passes and blocked two kicks as well.

SPECIALISTS Punter Luke Larsen returns after 60 punts in 2023 with just one touchback and 19 kicks landing inside the 20-yard line. Andrew Conrad also returns at placekicker after averaging 1.5 made field goals per game last season, although he missed seven of his 25 attempts. Neither Javious Bond nor Josh Murphy really had a signature moment in the return game in 2023.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Pirates just never seemed to get their feet under them on the way to a 2-10 record last season. In four one-score losses, the Pirates couldn't get out of their own way. Houston now has seen three of his five seasons at ECU end with a losing record, which has no doubt left a bad taste in the mouth of the former FCS championship winner (at James Madison).

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Norfolk State
Sept. 7	at Old Dominion
Sept. 14	App State
Sept. 21	at Liberty
Sept. 28	UTSA
Oct. 5	at Charlotte
Oct. 19	at Army
Oct. 26	Temple
Nov. 7	Florida Atlantic
Nov. 14	at Tulsa
Nov. 23	at North Texas
Nov. 30	Navy

2023 RESULTS (2-10, 1-7 AAC)

Sept. 2	at Michigan	L	3-30
Sept. 9	Marshall	L	13-31
Sept. 16	at App State	L	28-43
Sept. 23	Gardner-Webb	W	44-0
Sept. 30	at Rice	L	17-24
Oct. 12	SMU	L	10-31
Oct. 21	Charlotte	L	7-10
Oct. 28	at UTSA	L	27-41
Nov. 4	Tulane	L	10-13
Nov. 11	at Florida Atlantic	W	22-7
Nov. 18	at Navy	L	0-10
Nov. 25	Tulsa	L	27-29

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Yannick Smith, WR	★★★★
2.	Eric Fletcher, ATH	★★★
3.	KJ Merrell, LB	★★★
4.	O'marion Lewis, S	★★★
5.	Jayson Tarpeh, OT	★★★
6.	Trenton Cloud, WR	★★★
7.	Ja'Marley Riddle, S	★★★
8.	Kenny Walz, OT	★★★
9.	Samuel Riddy, EDGE	★★★
10.	TJ Engleman, RB	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Houston • Record at School: 24-34 (5 years) • Career Record: 103-58 (13 years)
Offensive Coordinator: John David Baker • Defensive Coordinator: Blake Harrell • Location: Greenville, N.C.
Stadium: Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium (50,000)

Rahjai Harris

SCOUTING THE PIRATES

"This is probably the make-or-break year for that coaching staff. I think you could say both the school and staff have been patient so far because of how that program's fallen on the field and financially off of it. This used to be one of the best G5 programs in the country, and they've really struggled the last decade to keep that identity. ... They've upgraded with some nice transfer pieces, and they should be better defensively. ... If they can't get above .500 this year, I think they make a move. This job still has a lot of potential in a great area for talent."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	5	**CHASE SOWELL (SO.)**	3	Kelan Robinson (Jr.)
WR	13	Anthony Smith (Sr.)	7	Kerry King (Sr.)
WR	1	Winston Wright Jr. (Sr.)	0	Jhari Patterson (Jr.)
LT	60	Emmanuel Poku (So.)	52	**PARKER MOORER (SR.)**
LG	55	Darius Bell (Jr.)	61	Jayson Tarpeh (Jr.)
C	65	**DUSTYN HALL (SR.)**	78	William Coats (So.)
RG	76	**JACOB SACRA (SO.)**	63	Jake Crocker (So.)
RT	74	**HAMPTON ERGLE (SR.)**	66	Marleo Neolien (So.)
TE	10	Casey Kelly (Sr.)	6	Desirrio Riles (So.)
QB	11	Jake Garcia (Jr.)	4	Katin Houser (So.)
RB	47	**RAHJAI HARRIS (SR.)**	30	Javious Bond (So.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	3	**CHAD STEPHENS (SR.)**	9	J.D. Lampley (Jr.)
DT	56	**D'ANTA JOHNSON (SR.)**	93	Jaden McKenzie (Sr.)
DT	90	Elijah Morris (Sr.)	53	**SUIRAD WARE (SR.)**
DE	32	Ryheem Craig (Jr.)	7	Samuel Dankah (Jr.)
OLB	10	**MIKE EDWARDS III (SR.)**	41	DJ Johnson Jr. (Fr.)
MLB	23	Dameon Wilson (Jr.)	51	Shane Perry (Sr.)
OLB	25	Kingston McKinstry (Sr.)	40	Greg Turner (Fr.)
CB	11	Andrew Wilson-Lamp (Jr.)	26	**ISAIAH BROWN-MURRAY (SO.)**
CB	28	**SHAVON REVEL (SR.)**	24	TyMir Brown (Jr.)
S	21	Jordan Huff (Sr.)	6	Dontavius Nash (Jr.)
S	5	Gavin Gibson (Jr.)	2	Devon King (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	95	Andrew Conrad (Jr.)	KR	30	Javious Bond (Jr.)
P	12	Luke Larsen (Sr.)	PR	19	Josh Murphy (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

James Guillory-USA TODAY Sports

Jackson Ambush

Jeff Romance

SCOUTING THE OWLS

"Tom [Herman] is trying to rebuild that thing from the high school level up, which is smart, but it's going to take longer than just shortcutting with a huge portal class. That staff is rededicated to recruiting Florida to turn it around with local guys. ... They just didn't have an offense last year. [Former quarterback] Casey [Thompson] was out early, and the backup who transferred wasn't ready. They need to fix their offensive line and have a starter ready to go at camp. They're getting more talented in Year 2 across the board. Tom knows how to play that underdog role with his guys. He can put a chip on your shoulder. They'll be much better this season."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	4	BJ Alexander (Sr.)	19	Dominique Henry (So.)
WR	11	Marlyn Johnson (Sr.)	3	Jayshon Platt (Jr.)
WR	0	Milan Tucker (Sr.)	9	Caleb Coombs (Jr.)
LT	70	Malcolm Lamar Sr. (Sr.)	57	Ja'Kavion Nonar (So.)
LG	74	Ovie Dubre (Fr.)	54	Jordan Church (Fr.)
C	**64**	**FEDERICO MARANGES (SR.)**	73	Alex Atcavage (Sr.)
RG	67	Andre Lamas (Sr.)	62	Okino King (So.)
RT	78	Daughtry Richardson (So.)	55	Woody Jean (Jr.)
TE	**48**	**ZEKE MOORE (SO.)**	18	Kahlil Brantley (Jr.)
QB	1	Cameron Fancher (Jr.)	8	Tyriq Starks (Jr.)
RB	2	Zuberi Mobley (Jr.)	22	CJ Campbell Jr. (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	**49**	**CHRIS JONES (SR.)**	16	Chisom Ifeanyi (Sr.)
DT	18	Jaden Wheeler (Sr.)	50	Jacob Merrifield (Jr.)
DT	99	Prince Boyd (Sr.)	90	Decarius Hawthorne (Sr.)
OLB	**95**	**MARLON BRADLEY (SR.)**		August Salvati (Jr.)
MLB	**9**	**DESMOND TISDOL (SR.)**	**3**	**EDDIE WILLIAMS (SR.)**
OLB	**43**	**JACKSON AMBUSH (SR.)**	44	Jarrett Jerrels (Sr.)
CB	**6**	**DAEDAE HILL (SR.)**	12	Cameron Goggins (Fr.)
CB	11	Kahzir Brown (Sr.)	24	Michal Antoine Jr. (Sr.)
NB	5	Jayden Williams (Jr.)	26	Chris Tooley III (So.)
S	4	Phillip Dunnam (Jr.)	10	Wendol Philord (Sr.)
S	20	Fabian Scott (So.)	27	Jaheim Mlller (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	16	Logan Lupo (Jr.)	KR	3	Jayshon Platt (Jr.)
P	16	Logan Lupo (Jr.)	PR	3	Jayshon Platt (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

FLORIDA ATLANTIC OWLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 96 | AAC PREDICTION: 7 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 AAC

OFFENSE In its first year under new head coach Tom Herman, Florida Atlantic regressed slightly on offense in 2023. The Owls scored 23.8 points per game last season compared to 29.8 in 2022.

In the offseason, the Owls' portal losses were noticeable, including three quarterbacks who sought different opportunities. The Owls did manage to sign former Marshall starter Cameron Fancher. The redshirt junior is a strong candidate for the starting job after throwing for 2,162 yards and 11 touchdowns for the Thundering Herd last season, but Tyriq Starks had a particularly strong spring and will be in the running as well.

For those who remember Herman offenses from the height of his coaching career, the Owls will likely be hoping to pick up the pace this season after running 65.1 plays per game last season. The Owls also had possession of the ball for a league-low 27 minutes and five seconds per game. With the number of new faces, that could be a challenge as they all learn to jell.

DEFENSE While the offense regressed in 2023, the defense improved by a small margin, although the Owls still allowed nearly 400 yards per game. Getting that number down with the help of a few key returning veterans will give them more breathing room.

Aptly named leading tackler Jackson Ambush returns this season after 89 total stops last season with 6.5 for a loss, a sack and an interception. In the secondary, defensive backs Daedae Hill and Jayden Williams are key returners. That pair combined for 77 tackles last season as well three interceptions and five pass breakups. FCS Maine transfer Kahzir "Buggs" Brown is also expected to be a contributor in the secondary after a strong showing in spring practice. Brown broke up seven passes for the Black Bears last season.

SPECIALISTS Kicking specialist Logan Lupo returns after going 5-for-8 on field goals last season. He was 21-for-21 on extra points. Lupo also handled punting duties last season averaging 44 yards per punt and booting the longest ball in the American Athletic Conference at 71 yards. They'll need a new face to return kicks after losing AAC Special Teamer of the Year LaJohntay Wester to Colorado in the portal.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Owls need an offensive spark again. They haven't really had one since Devin Singletary moved on to the NFL and Lane Kiffin went to Ole Miss. Despite portal turnover, perhaps Herman and his staff can find that again in their fast-paced system now that they have a year under their belts.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Michigan St.
Sept. 7	Army
Sept. 14	FIU
Sept. 21	at Connecticut
Sept. 28	Wagner
Oct. 12	North Texas
Oct. 19	at UTSA
Nov. 1	South Florida
Nov. 7	at East Carolina
Nov. 16	at Temple
Nov. 23	Charlotte
Nov. 30	at Tulsa

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 AAC)

Sept. 2	Monmouth	W	42-20
Sept. 9	Ohio	L	10-17
Sept. 16	at Clemson	L	14-48
Sept. 23	at Illinois	L	17-23
Oct. 7	Tulsa	W	20-17
Oct. 14	at South Florida	W	56-14
Oct. 21	UTSA	L	10-36
Oct. 27	at Charlotte	W	38-16
Nov. 4	at UAB	L	42-45
Nov. 11	East Carolina	L	7-22
Nov. 18	Tulane	L	8-24
Nov. 25	at Rice	L	21-24

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Joseph Young, WR	★★★
2.	Gavench Marcelin, DL	★★★
3.	Char'quez Lee, LB	★★★
4.	Mauricio Hinds, OT	★★★
5.	Leon Washington, WR	★★★
6.	Remington Roberts, LB	★★★
7.	Kaden Shields-Dutton, RB	★★★
8.	Kyle Boylston, WR	★★★
9.	Lawrence Johnson, CB	★★★
10.	Ethan Proffitt, OL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tom Herman • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 58-30 (7 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Charlie Frye • Defensive Coordinators: Roc Bellantoni, Brandon Harris
Location: Boca Raton, Fla. • Stadium: FAU Stadium (30,000)

MEMPHIS TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 37 | AAC PREDICTION: 1 | 2023 RECORD: 10-3, 6-2 AAC

OFFENSE The Tigers return the top scoring offense in the American Athletic Conference from last season at 39.4 points per game. Memphis scored on 55 of 63 trips inside the red zone in 2023. It's a major reason why they won 10 games, their best record yet under head coach Ryan Silverfield and their 10th consecutive season of bowl eligibility.

Seth Henigan, one of seven returning starters on offense for the Tigers, enters his fourth season as Memphis' starting quarterback. He already has an extremely impressive body of work, including ranking fourth in FBS with 3,883 passing yards in 2023. Memphis also returns two of the top receivers in the AAC this season in Roc Taylor (1,083 yards in 2023) and Demeer Blankumsee (901).

Whoever replaces running back Blake Watson's production in the backfield will do so behind an experienced offensive line.

DEFENSE The Tigers have room for improvement on the defensive side of the ball. They allowed 423.2 yards and 28.8 points per game in 2023. This was a regression from 2022, when they allowed 363.4 yards per game.

Past the midway point of last season, the Tigers' pass defense became particularly susceptible, as they allowed five touchdown passes in back-to-back weeks and at least three in three of the last six weeks of the season.

Two transfer safeties — Kourtlan Marsh (FCS Samford) and Tahj Ra-El (Old Dominion) — will hope to make an immediate impact. They'll look to help Memphis cut down on the amount of explosive plays the defense surrendered in 2023. The Tigers allowed 80 plays longer than 20 yards last season and 38 plays of 30-plus yards. That needs to change as the quarterback play continues to elevate across the AAC.

SPECIALISTS Veteran kicker Tanner Gillis enters yet another season with the Tigers after hitting 47-of-49 extra points and 10-of-13 field goals. Former UTEP punter Joshua Sloan transfers in after averaging 44.2 yards per punt for the Miners. Sutton Smith had the second-best kick return average in the AAC last season with 24.2 yards per return.

FINAL ANALYSIS Memphis will be one of the favorites, if not the outright favorite, to win the AAC. Silverfield just had his contract extended, Henigan is one of the most experienced starting quarterbacks in FBS and the defense is making progress — though that progress might need to happen a little faster. Things are trending the right way in Memphis, and a highly successful season could even mean a playoff berth in the newly expanded format.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	North Alabama
Sept. 7	Troy
Sept. 14	at Florida State
Sept. 21	at Navy
Sept. 28	Middle Tennessee
Oct. 11	at South Florida
Oct. 19	North Texas
Oct. 26	Charlotte
Nov. 2	at UTSA
Nov. 8	Rice
Nov. 16	UAB
Nov. 28	at Tulane

2023 RESULTS (10-3, 6-2 AAC)

Sept. 2	Bethune-Cookman	W	56-14
Sept. 9	at Arkansas State	W	37-3
Sept. 14	Navy	W	28-24
Sept. 23	vs. Missouri #	L	27-34
Sept. 30	Boise State	W	35-32
Oct. 13	Tulane	L	21-31
Oct. 21	at UAB	W	45-21
Oct. 28	at North Texas	W	45-42
Nov. 4	South Florida	W	59-5
Nov. 11	at Charlotte (ot)	W	44-38
Nov. 18	SMU	L	34-38
Nov. 24	at Temple	W	45-21
Dec. 29	vs. Iowa State %	W	36-26

#St. Louis %Liberty Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Keonde Henry, WR	★★★★
2.	Arrington Maiden, QB	★★★
3.	Jonathan Young, OT	★★★
4.	Calvin McMillian, OT	★★★
5.	Kobe Williams, OL	★★★
6.	MaKari Bodiford, RB	★★★
7.	Kavion Benton, DL	★★★
8.	Elijah Williams, OT	★★★
9.	Khyair Spain, RB	★★★
10.	Commondre Cole, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ryan Silverfield • Record at School: 31-19 (4-plus years) • Career Record: 31-19 (4-plus years)
Offensive Coordinator: Tim Cramsey • Defensive Coordinator: Jordon Hankins • Location: Memphis, Tenn.
Stadium: Simmons Bank Liberty Stadium (58,325)

Seth Henigan

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"They could be the G5 playoff team this season if they can figure out how to replace the offensive line play they got last year. That was a huge reason they were able to break out and have a 10-win season, and it's the reason why the QB [Seth Henigan] was breaking records. The offensive line is their one questionable group, but it's definitely a big one. ... The internal promotion at DC [Jordon Hankins] makes a lot of sense; they have a really talented group. The best player on the team is the linebacker [Chandler Martin]; he can be a Sunday player. Getting the NIL help from FedEx is a legit move up for them. They could be dominant at the G5 level."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	3	**ROC TAYLOR (SR.)**	4	Jyaire Shorter (Sr.)
WR	10	**KOBY DRAKE (SR.)**	1	Ja'Koby Banks (So.)
WR	0	**DEMEER BLANKUMSEE (SR.)**	6	Marcello Bussey (Sr.)
LT	52	Jaylen Nichols (Sr.)	66	Calvin McMillan (Jr.)
LG	54	Trent Holler (Sr.)	78	Mitchell Gildehaus (Sr.)
C	65	**JONAH GAMBILL (SR.)**	74	Kyndal McKenzie (So.)
RG	71	**XAVIER HILL (JR.)**	64	Izaiah Reed (Fr.)
RT	70	Keydrell Lewis (Sr.)	68	Jonathan Young (Jr.)
TE	82	**ANTHONY LANDPHERE (SR.)**	86	Brendan Doyle (Jr.)
QB	9	**SETH HENIGAN (SR.)**	16	Cade Cunningham (Jr.)
RB	2	Mario Anderson (Sr.)	5	Sutton Smith (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	12	**CORMONTAE HAMILTON (SR.)**	93	Devin Baldwin (Sr.)
DT	50	Patrick Lucas Jr. (Sr.)	51	Joshua White (So.)
DT	40	**KEVEION'TA SPEARS (JR.)**	6	Derick Hunter Jr. (Sr.)
DE	94	William Whitlow Jr. (Jr.)	26	AJ Odom (So.)
OLB	11	**CHANDLER MARTIN (JR.)**	31	Wesley Scott (Sr.)
MLB	32	Javante Mackey (So.)	44	Bryce Edmondson (Jr.)
OLB	49	Matt Hudson (Sr.)	48	Jayden Flaker (Jr.)
CB	1	Davion Ross (Sr.)	2	Julian Barnett (Sr.)
CB	3	Tyrin Taylor (Sr.)	5	DJ Bell (So.)
S	0	Kourtlan Marsh (Sr.)	9	Tahj Ra-El (Sr.)
S	24	**GREG RUBIN (SR.)**	10	AJ Watts (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	46	Tanner Gillis (Sr.)	KR	5	Sutton Smith (Jr.)
P	13	Joshua Sloan (Sr.)	PR	10	Koby Drake (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Petre Thomas-USA TODAY Sports

Colin Ramos

SCOUTING THE MIDSHIPMEN

"Last year was a big transition for [Brian] Newberry, and they looked terrible on offense. The new OC is the thing to watch this year. [Drew] Cronic runs a lot of stuff in that gap duo scheme; it's a really creative system where there's a lot of different looks and motions that can help a service academy squad get some leverage and still be creative while protecting the disadvantages they're dealing with. ... They made the staff change last season because there was a feeling that they'd fallen behind Army. Until Newberry can beat them, it's kind of a one-game season mentality for that program and that athletic director."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	82	Nathan Kent (Jr.)	0	Kroy Myers (Sr.)
LT	**59**	**CONNOR MCMAHON (SR.)**	73	Michael Whitehouse (Sr.)
LG	64	Ben Purvis (Jr.)	72	Greyson Crawford (Jr.)
C	**65**	**BRENT SELF (SR.)**	79	Hoke Smith II (So.)
RG	**62**	**JAVAN BOUTON (SR.)**	69	Cam Nichols (So.)
RT	66	Trey Cummings (Sr.)	67	Creedyn Foulger (Sr.)
TE	88	Thomas Scully (Sr.)	83	Cody Howard (Jr.)
QB	11	Blake Horvath (Jr.)	5	Braxton Woodson (So.)
RB	22	Eli Heidenreich (Jr.)	20	TK Hodges (So.)
RB	24	Brandon Chatman (Jr.)	25	Isaiah Bryant (So.)
FB	**46**	**ALEX TECZA (JR.)**	45	Daba Fofana (Sr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	**94**	**JUSTIN REED (SR.)**	91	Chreign LaFond (Jr.)
DT	96	Landon Robinson (Jr.)	95	Griffen Willis (So.)
DT	98	Kendall Whiteside (Jr.)	99	Tyler Narayan (Jr.)
RAIDER	**35**	**LUKE PIRRIS (JR.)**	33	Jordan Sanders (Sr.)
STRIKER	14	Jaxson Campbell (Jr.)	17	Riley Bergeson (Jr.)
MLB	39	Job Grant (So.)	43	Kyle Jacob (Sr.)
OLB	**44**	**COLIN RAMOS (SR.)**	59	Elijah Oatsvall (Jr.)
CB	**13**	**ANDREW DUHART (JR.)**	3	Ira Oniha (So.)
CB	**1**	**DASHAUN PEELE (SR.)**	20	Greg Johnson II (So.)
S	**7**	**MBITI WILLIAMS JR. (SR.)**	26	Kush'i Abraham (So.)
S	**18**	**RAYUAN LANE III (SR.)**	29	Giuseppe Sessi (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	17	Nathan Kirkwood (Jr.)	KR	23	Tyler Bradley (So.)
P	90	Riley Riethman (Sr.)	PR	28	Amin Hassan (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Tommy Gilligan-USA TODAY Sports

NAVY MIDSHIPMEN

NATIONAL FORECAST: 104 | AAC PREDICTION: 10 | 2023 RECORD: 5-7, 4-4 AAC

OFFENSE Like their counterparts at Army, the Midshipmen made a change at offensive coordinator this past offseason following one year with Grant Chesnut. Former FCS Mercer head coach Drew Cronic assumes that position for the upcoming campaign. Cronic runs a variation of the Wing-T system that tries to exploit mismatches on the edges, which he sometimes refers to as the "Sling-T."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Navy had the third-highest percentage of running plays in the nation last season, keeping it on the ground 71 percent of the time with its traditional option system. The Midshipmen had the 17th-ranked rushing offense in FBS and the best in the AAC with 194.6 yards per game. Fullback Alex Tecza is arguably the team's best running back, netting team highs in yards (758) and rushing touchdowns (five) in 2023.

DEFENSE As a unit, the Navy defense did not really have one particular strength. The Midshipmen allowed only 22.4 points per game, mostly as a result of limiting opponents' time of possession, as has long been a habit of theirs. Also notable: Navy's opponents missed half of their 14 field-goal attempts last year.

Linebacker Colin Ramos will be one of the leaders of the defense after 110 tackles and a first-team All-AAC nod last season. Ramos also had two sacks and nine tackles for a loss. Another leader will be safety Rayuan Lane III, who was a third-team all-conference selection with 66 tackles and four interceptions last season in addition to two forced fumbles.

Senior Justin Reed is the leader on the defensive front. Reed is the only senior expected to see extensive playing time in that group, which is a break from tradition for the Mids. Reed and linebacker Luke Pirris tied for the team lead with 4.5 sacks apiece last season.

SPECIALISTS Punter Riley Riethman was a first-team All-AAC selection last season after booting 20 more punts than the next-closest punter in the league. He also kicked 20 more than 50 yards and landed 20 inside the 20-yard line. Kicker Nathan Kirkwood will hope to boost his long-range accuracy after missing three of his five attempts from beyond 40 yards.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Midshipmen were only a few plays away from returning to the postseason in Brian Newberry's first campaign, finishing the season 5-7. Some shifts in the offensive strategy have been the big emphasis of the offseason with the hire of Cronic. Stretching the field just a bit more could be the difference-maker they need to get to the postseason again.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Bucknell
Sept. 7	Temple
Sept. 21	Memphis
Sept. 28	at UAB
Oct. 5	at Air Force
Oct. 19	Charlotte
Oct. 26	vs. Notre Dame #
Nov. 2	at Rice
Nov. 9	at South Florida
Nov. 16	Tulane
Nov. 30	at East Carolina
Dec. 14	vs. Army %

#East Rutherford, NJ
%Landover, MD

2023 RESULTS (5-7, 4-4 AAC)

Aug. 26	vs. Notre Dame #	L	3-42
Sept. 9	Wagner	W	24-0
Sept. 14	at Memphis	L	24-28
Sept. 30	South Florida	L	30-44
Oct. 7	North Texas	W	27-24
Oct. 14	at Charlotte	W	14-0
Oct. 21	Air Force	L	6-17
Nov. 4	at Temple	L	18-32
Nov. 11	UAB	W	31-6
Nov. 18	East Carolina	W	10-0
Nov. 25	at SMU	L	14-59
Dec. 9	vs. Army %	L	11-17

#Dublin %Foxborough

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Benjamin Franklin, ATH	★★★
2.	Austin Stull, S	★★★
3.	Andre Jackson, RB	★★★
4.	Parker Turner, LB	★★★
5.	Harry Beacham, LB	★★★
6.	Alex Erby, QB	★★★
7.	Tsion Brown, LB	★★★
8.	Gavin Widener, EDGE	★★★
9.	Reid Watkins, RB	★★★
10.	Brady McDonough, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brian Newberry • Record at School: 5-7 (1 year) • Career Record: 5-7 (1 year)
Offensive Coordinator: Drew Cronic • Defensive Coordinator: P.J. Volker • Location: Annapolis, Md.
Stadium: Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium (34,000)

UNT NORTH TEXAS MEAN GREEN

NATIONAL FORECAST: 103 | AAC PREDICTION: 9 | 2023 RECORD: 5-7, 3-5 AAC

OFFENSE Even with a few growing pains under new head coach Eric Morris, the North Texas offense wasn't to blame for the team's losing record last season. Averaging 495.8 yards per game, the Mean Green were sixth in FBS in that category and first in the American Athletic Conference.

UNT lost its starting quarterback from last season, Chandler Rogers, to the transfer portal. The two most likely candidates to take over are TCU transfer Chandler Morris and last season's backup Stone Earle. Earle has seen action in eight games since transferring from FCS Abilene Christian two years ago and has shown the ability to be an adequate dual threat capable of extending plays with his legs.

The offense has a handful of other interesting pieces as well, including running back Ikaika Ragsdale, who started seven games and scored 10 total touchdowns in 2022. He missed nearly all of 2023 with an injury but is expected to be healthy this fall.

DEFENSE Plain and simple, North Texas was one of the worst defensive teams in the nation in 2023, ranking last in FBS with 476.4 total yards allowed per game. Surrendering 37.1 points per game put them in the bottom three nationally in scoring defense. Obviously, things have to improve on this side of the ball. Five returning starters should help the first and second levels be a bit stingier.

On the backline, one of the conference's better performers returns in defensive back Ridge Texada. The three-year starter has been among the top defensive backs first in Conference USA and now in the AAC — racking up 96 tackles, four interceptions and 28 passes defended during his time in Denton.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Blake Ford arrives after two seasons at Arkansas. He was a kickoff specialist for the Razorbacks last year. At punter, senior Sawyer Evans returns after averaging 43.3 yards per punt with 12 downed inside the 20 and six punts of at least 50 yards. UNT's return game was nothing special last season with averages of 4.5 yards on punt returns and 19.5 on kick returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS For North Texas, letting go of former head coach Seth Littrell following the 2022 season was something of a gamble. Morris' 5-7 record in his debut season was worse than either of Littrell's final two seasons in Denton. That's not to say that the year was a failure for the second-time head coach, but it's fair to say that things simply have to click more often, particularly on defense, for the Mean Green to get where they want to go.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at South Alabama
Sept. 7	Stephen F. Austin
Sept. 14	at Texas Tech
Sept. 21	Wyoming
Sept. 28	Tulsa
Oct. 12	at Florida Atlantic
Oct. 19	at Memphis
Oct. 26	Tulane
Nov. 9	Army
Nov. 15	at UTSA
Nov. 23	East Carolina
Nov. 30	at Temple

2023 RESULTS (5-7, 3-5 AAC)

Sept. 2	California	L	21-58
Sept. 9	at FIU	L	39-46
Sept. 16	at Louisiana Tech	W	40-37
Sept. 30	Abilene Christian	W	45-31
Oct. 7	at Navy	L	24-27
Oct. 14	Temple	W	45-14
Oct. 21	at Tulane	L	28-35
Oct. 28	Memphis	L	42-45
Nov. 4	UTSA	L	29-37
Nov. 10	at SMU	L	21-45
Nov. 18	at Tulsa	W	35-28
Nov. 25	UAB	W	45-42

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaydon Smith, WR	★★★★
2.	Jaedon Langley, DL	★★★
3.	Jaden Pettway, S	★★★
4.	Gabe Stroud, CB	★★★
5.	Mason Ferguson, WR	★★★
6.	Brandon Young, TE	★★★
7.	Tyler Mercer, OL	★★★
8.	Wyatt Young, ATH	★★★
9.	Victor Aderungboye, TE	★★★
10.	Baron Tipton, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Eric Morris • Record at School: 5-7 (1 year) • Career Record: 29-25 (5 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Jordan Davis • Defensive Coordinator: Matt Caponi • Location: Denton, Texas
Stadium: DATCU Stadium (30,850)

Damon Ward

SCOUTING THE MEAN GREEN

"On paper they got exactly what you expected from hiring a guy like Eric [Morris] in his first year — lots of pass game success with a quarterback that put up great stats. Then they were gutted in the portal and lost pretty much every productive piece of that offense. ... They're going to start the TCU QB [Chandler Morris] as soon as he gets there; he's by far their best option. The defense is bad, and they're sticking with the 3-3 stack scheme, it looks like. That's a really questionable move because they didn't have the bodies for it last season, and they won't up front again this season. ... You can see what Morris wants to build, but you can't get there if you're replacing every productive offensive player every year."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	11	Jeremiah Aaron (Jr.)	18	Mason Ferguson (Fr.)
WR	8	Damon Ward (Sr.)	17	Dalton Carnes (So.)
WR	0	Blair Conwright (Sr.)	10	DT Sheffield (Jr.)
LT	58	Ma'Kyi Lee (Jr.)	74	Larry Moore (Sr.)
LG	65	**GABE BLAIR (SR.)**	77	Johnny Dickson (So.)
C	62	Trystan Butler (Jr.)	73	Jasper Lott (Jr.)
RG	72	Landon Peterson (Sr.)	77	Johnny Dickson (So.)
RT	64	**JETT DUNCAN (SR.)**	74	Larry Moore (Sr.)
TE	88	Xzavior Kautai (Jr.)	23	Oscar Hammond (Jr.)
QB	3	Stone Earle (Sr.)		Chandler Morris (Jr.)
RB	6	Ikaika Ragsdale (Jr.)	26	Zach Evans (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	90	Jake Shipley (Sr.)	95	Kortlin Rausaw (Jr.)
DT	10	**RODERICK BROWN (SR.)**	97	Otis Walden (So.)
DE	15	**FATAFEHI VAILEA (JR.)**	95	Kortlin Rausaw (Jr.)
OLB	19	**JORDAN BROWN (SR.)**	35	JJ Jean-Louis (Fr.)
MLB	36	Jaylen Smith (Sr.)	24	Chavez Brown (Jr.)
OLB	32	**ETHAN WESLOSKI (SO.)**	40	Trent Ayers (Sr.)
CB	5	**RIDGE TEXADA (SR.)**	13	Brian Nelson II (Fr.)
CB	23	X'Avion Brice (So.)	6	Loronzo Thompson (Sr.)
NB	16	Evan Jackson (So.)	14	Jayven Anderson (So.)
S	11	Isheem Young (Sr.)	43	Cameron Minix (Jr.)
S	30	BJ Allen Jr. (So.)	21	Jayden Hill (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	29	Blake Ford (So.)	KR	8	Damon Ward (Sr.)
P	41	Sawyer Evans (Sr.)	PR	10	DT Sheffield (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Zach Del Bello/Mean Green Sports

Dean Connors

SCOUTING THE OWLS

"Last season was the most talented they've been under that staff, but now they have to replace [wide receiver Luke] McCaffery and [quarterback JT] Daniels. Their best running back [Dean Connors] is back, and the offensive line is pretty solid, so they've got a nice structure to put a transfer QB in front of. ... We assume the QB will be [Temple transfer E.J.] Warner; he has the experience to handle Mike Bloomgren's pro-style system. ... The defense could sneak up on some teams after last year. They looked better in every phase — not great, but you could see improvement on their film — and most of those guys are supposed to be coming back. ... If the QB is good, they could bowl again."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	80	Rawson MacNeill (So.)	8	Matt Sykes (Sr.)
WR	2	Kobie Campbell (Sr.)	81	Braylen Walker (So.)
LT		Chad Lindberg (Sr.)	75	Miguel Cedeno (So.)
LG	77	**BRANT BANKS (SR.)**	50	Patrick Valent (Fr.)
C	52	**BRAEDON NUTTER (SR.)**	79	Weston Kropp (Jr.)
RG	73	**LAVEL DUMONT (FR.)**	75	Miguel Cedeno (So.)
RT	72	Spencer Cassell (Sr.)	58	Peyton Farmer (Fr.)
TE	14	Boden Groen (Jr.)	7	Elijah Mojarro (Sr.)
QB	13	E.J. Warner (Jr.)	12	AJ Padgett (So.)
RB	0	Dean Connors (Sr.)	16	Quinton Jackson (So.)
FB	30	Micah Barnett (Jr.)	44	Geron Hargon (Jr.)
DEFENSE (9)				
DE	94	Charlie Looes (Sr.)	**44**	**COLEMAN COCO (SR.)**
DT	50	**IZEYA FLOYD (SR.)**	75	Blake Boenisch (Jr.)
DT	74	Michael Larbie (Sr.)	30	Elroyal Morris III (Jr.)
OLB	49	Michael Daley (Jr.)	**5**	**JOSH PEARCY (SR.)**
MLB	11	**CHRIS CONTI (SR.)**	6	DJ Arkansas (Jr.)
OLB	33	**MYRON MORRISON (SR.)**	7	Chike Anigbogu (Sr.)
VIPER	41	**PLAE WYATT (JR.)**	9	Peyton Stevenson (Jr.)
CB	1	**SEAN FRESCH (SR.)**	12	Lloyd McFarquhar (Sr.)
CB	13	Lamont Narcisse (Jr.)	17	Max Ahoia (Sr.)
S	22	**JONATHAN JEAN (JR.)**	29	Daveon Hook (Jr.)
S	26	**GABRIEL TAYLOR (JR.)**	31	Tyson Flowers (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	15	Tim Horn (Sr.)	KR 16	Quinton Jackson (Jr.)
P	23	Conor Hunt (Sr.)	PR 1	Sean Fresch (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Tim Heitman-USA TODAY Sports

RICE OWLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 91 | AAC PREDICTION: 6 | 2023 RECORD: 6-7, 4-4 AAC

OFFENSE NFL Draft pick Luke McCaffrey, a wide receiver and Christian's younger brother, is a notable departure for the Owls after he barely missed a 1,000-yard receiving season last season. That being said, running back Dean Connors is a candidate for the 1,000-yard club. Connors was the Owls' leading rusher last season with 771 yards on 121 carries, and he was the second-leading receiver with 43 catches for 403 yards. Connors also had 10 total touchdowns in the Owls' 6-7 campaign.

Perhaps the most notable change for Rice this coming season will be at quarterback. The Owls managed to sign former Temple quarterback E.J. Warner, son of NFL legend Kurt, in December. Warner led the AAC in passing at Temple last season with an average of 307.6 yards per game. He should fit well into head coach Mike Bloomgren's offensive system.

Rice's other key offensive pickups in the transfer portal came on the offensive line. Chad Lindberg (Georgia) will likely take one of the starting spots, either at tackle or at guard. FCS Harvard transfer Spencer Cassell is also notable given his All-Ivy League pedigree and his versatility.

DEFENSE While SMU had the top passing defense in the American last season, Rice has the top returning pass defense in the league with the Mustangs moving on to the ACC. The Owls allowed 211.6 yards per game and tied SMU by yielding a league-low 17 passing touchdowns.

Rice also had one of the better red-zone defenses in FBS, allowing opponents to score on 76.1 percent of their trips, ranking 19th in the nation.

One particularly intriguing transfer addition for the Owls is 6-foot-3 defensive lineman Charlie Looes from FCS Dartmouth. Looes was a finalist for Ivy League Defensive Player of the Year last season after leading the league in sacks with 7.5.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Tim Horn was perfect on extra points last season, hitting all 47 of his attempts. He did miss four of his 12 field-goal attempts, including two from beyond 40 yards. Running back Quinton Jackson showed some promise returning kickoffs, averaging 23.4 yards per return.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Owls have taken baby steps forward since Bloomgren took over. The next step is a winning season — easier said than done, but possible. The roadblocks include another crosstown rivalry game with Houston and a tough three-game stretch to end the season with Memphis, UAB and South Florida. If new playmakers like Warner and Looes and returners like Connors can get back into their respective grooves, it could be a banner year for Bloomgren's tenure.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Sam Houston
Sept. 7	Texas Southern
Sept. 14	at Houston
Sept. 21	at Army
Sept. 28	Charlotte
Oct. 12	UTSA
Oct. 19	at Tulane
Oct. 26	at Connecticut
Nov. 2	Navy
Nov. 8	at Memphis
Nov. 23	at UAB
Nov. 30	South Florida

2023 RESULTS (6-7, 4-4 AAC)

Sept. 2	at Texas	L	10-37
Sept. 9	Houston	W	43-41
Sept. 16	Texas Southern	W	59-7
Sept. 23	at South Florida	L	29-42
Sept. 30	East Carolina	W	24-17
Oct. 7	Connecticut	L	31-38
Oct. 19	at Tulsa	W	42-10
Oct. 28	Tulane	L	28-30
Nov. 4	SMU	L	31-36
Nov. 11	at UTSA	L	14-34
Nov. 18	at Charlotte	W	28-7
Nov. 25	Florida Atlantic	W	24-21
Dec. 26	vs. Texas State #	L	21-45

#First Responder Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kaleb Blanton, LB	★★★
2.	Owen Carter, WR	★★★
3.	Drew Devillier, QB	★★★
4.	Luke Miller, OT	★★★
5.	Bailey Fletcher, CB	★★★
6.	Taji Atkins, RB	★★★
7.	Lane Jeffcoat, OT	★★★
8.	Ephraim Dotson, CB	★★★
9.	LaVonte Johnson, S	★★★
10.	Tyler Days, LB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Bloomgren • Record at School: 22-46 (6 years) • Career Record: 22-46 (6 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Marques Tuiasosopo • Defensive Coordinator: Brian Smith • Location: Houston, Texas
Stadium: Rice Stadium (47,000)

SOUTH FLORIDA BULLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 54 | AAC PREDICTION: 3 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 4-4 AAC

OFFENSE Following four total wins in the previous three seasons, Alex Golesh stepped in as USF's head coach and immediately led the Bulls to a 7-6 season. It was a massive turnaround and an expectation-defying season in Tampa. Now, how do they build from there?

Among nine returning starters is 6-foot-3 sophomore quarterback Byrum Brown. Brown broke the USF single-season records for passing yards, passing touchdowns, completions and completion percentage in 2023, posting the first 3,000-yard passing season in program history. He and Heisman winner Jayden Daniels were the only FBS players to have 3,000 yards passing and 800 rushing in 2023. The Bulls will have to do a better job protecting him after allowing 43 sacks last season.

Other offensive names to watch include former Florida transfer Nay'Quan Wright, who seemed to find his groove as the main back for the Bulls, and receiver Sean Atkins, who had the first 1,000-yard receiving season in program history last year.

DEFENSE Cornerback Aamaris Brown and linebacker Jhalyn Shuler both return to lead the defense after earning All-AAC honorable mention honors last season. Shuler was the team's leader in tackles with 97, and he posted 8.5 tackles for a loss with two sacks. Brown broke up four passes with two interceptions in addition to 40 tackles.

The Bulls were last in the conference in passing yards per game allowed (288.8) and passing touchdowns allowed (29) last season. They did, however, pick off 14 passes and recover 10 fumbles, giving them a big-play identity. Former FCS Youngstown State safety D'Marco Augustin is expected to be an immediate impact transfer in that department.

SPECIALISTS Punter Andrew Stokes was reliable when called upon last season, averaging 40 yards per punt with six going more than 50 yards and 24 landing inside the 20-yard line — with no touchbacks. The return game was barely a factor for USF last season, but Atkins will once again be the primary punt returner with Kelley Joiner currently the most viable candidate to handle kickoffs. Kicker John Cannon was perfect on 52 extra-point attempts, but missed five of his 16 field-goal tries.

FINAL ANALYSIS For the first time in years, South Florida has some real momentum. Recruiting is going well, and they have a head coach with a strong offensive pedigree. Factor in the impending facility upgrades, and there's no reason that the Bulls can't keep moving forward. Of course, optimism creates extra pressure, so let's see how Golesh and staff respond to it.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Bethune-Cookman
Sept. 7	at Alabama
Sept. 14	at Southern Miss
Sept. 21	Miami
Sept. 28	at Tulane
Oct. 11	Memphis
Oct. 19	UAB
Nov. 1	at Florida Atlantic
Nov. 9	Navy
Oct. 16	at Charlotte
Nov. 23	Tulsa
Nov. 30	at Rice

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 4-4 AAC)

Sept. 2	at WKU	L	24-41
Sept. 9	Florida A&M	W	38-24
Sept. 16	Alabama	L	3-17
Sept. 23	Rice	W	42-29
Sept. 30	at Navy	W	44-30
Oct. 7	at UAB	L	35-56
Oct. 14	Florida Atlantic	L	14-56
Oct. 21	at Connecticut	W	24-21
Nov. 4	at Memphis	L	50-59
Nov. 11	Temple	W	27-23
Nov. 17	at UTSA	L	21-49
Nov. 25	Charlotte	W	48-14
Dec. 21	vs. Syracuse #	W	45-0

#Boca Raton Bowl

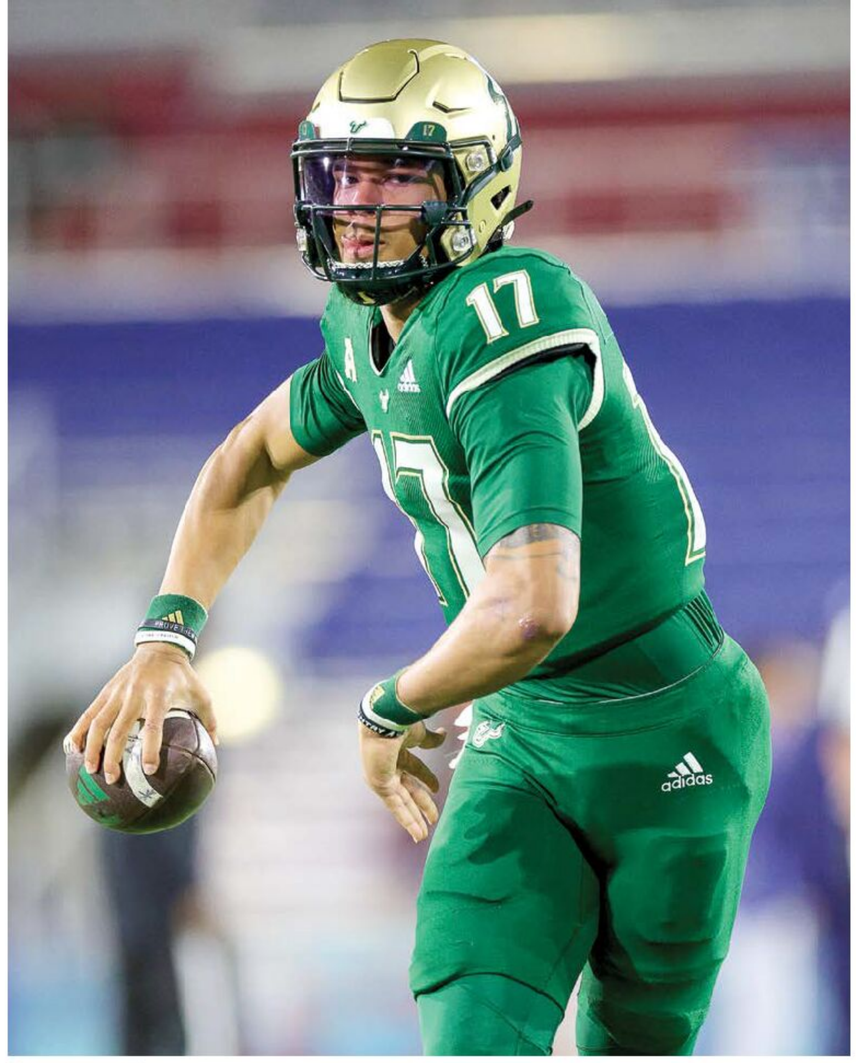
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jonathan Echols, TE	★★★
2.	Fred Gaskin III, S	★★★
3.	Ira Singleton, EDGE	★★★
4.	Rodney Hill, LB	★★★
5.	Brandon Winton Jr., WR	★★★
6.	Ryan Jenkins, EDGE	★★★
7.	Deylen Platt, CB	★★★
8.	Braden Carter, OT	★★★
9.	Ashton Mosley, EDGE	★★★
10.	Jaylen Pettus, EDGE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Alex Golesh • Record at School: 7-6 (1 year) • Career Record: 7-6 (1 year)
Offensive Coordinator: Joel Gordon • Defensive Coordinator: Todd Orlando • Location: Tampa, Fla.
Stadium: Raymond James Stadium (75,000)



Byrum Brown

SCOUTING THE BULLS

"Alex [Golesh] has done a fantastic job turning that place around. They're recruiting stronger than they have in years, and they've finally got the stadium plans in place. From the outside, this looks like a premier G5 job again. They've got a solid plan in place where they can recruit P4 players to an exciting offense at a Florida school, and they're also working the high schools. ... The secret is the simplicity and attractiveness of the offensive scheme. They're going to be more talented on that side of the ball especially, and they're going to attract more national attention."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (9)

WR	7	Michael Brown-Stephens (Sr.)	15	Tyree Kelly (So.)
WR	2	Abdur-Rahmaan Yaseen (Sr.)	80	Joshua Porter (Fr.)
WR	**38**	**SEAN ATKINS (SR.)**	**6**	**NAIEM SIMMONS (SR.)**
LT	**70**	**RJ PERRY (SR.)**	61	Gannon Lanning (Jr.)
LG	56	Cole Skinner (So.)	**75**	**ANDREW KILFOYL (JR.)**
C	65	Mike Lofton (Jr.)	72	Cole Best (Jr.)
RG	**51**	**ZANE HERRING (SR.)**	69	Hayden Zepp (So.)
RT	**62**	**DEREK BOWMAN (SR.)**	76	Nikola Milovac (Fr.)
TE	**18**	**WESTON WOLFF (JR.)**	87	Gunnar Greenwald (Sr.)
QB	**17**	**BYRUM BROWN (SO.)**	13	Israel Carter (Fr.)
RB	**5**	**NAY'QUAN WRIGHT (SR.)**	8	Kelley Joiner (Sr.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE	14	Michael Williams II (So.)	55	Jaylen Pettus (So.)
DT	**0**	**DOUG BLUE-ELI (JR.)**	6	Immanuel Hickman (Sr.)
DT	**99**	**RASHAD CHENEY (SR.)**	44	Jacquez Williams (So.)
DE	**11**	**D.J. HARRIS (JR.)**	4	Jason Vaughn (Sr.)
MLB	**24**	**MAC HARRIS (SR.)**	8	DJ Gordon IV (Sr.)
OLB	**7**	**JHALYN SHULER (SR.)**	19	Jamie Pettway (Sr.)
CB	**9**	**AAMARIS BROWN (SR.)**	20	Brent Austin (Jr.)
CB	2	Tavin Ward (So.)	22	De'Shawn Rucker (Jr.)
NB	10	D'Marco Augustin (Sr.)	28	Jarvis Lee (So.)
S	**21**	**JAELEN STOKES (JR.)**	12	Tawfiq Byard (Fr.)
S	**37**	**LOGAN BERRYHILL (SR.)**	13	Kajuan Banks (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	39	John Cannon (Jr.)	KR	8 Kelley Joiner (Sr.)
P	36	Andrew Stokes (Sr.)	PR	38 Sean Atkins (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Nathan Ray Seebeck-USA TODAY Sports

Dante Wright

Vincent Carchietta-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE OWLS

"We're not really sure what they're going to look like. They've been wrecked by the portal and lost most of their standout guys on both sides to transfer. It's not a good situation because they brought a flood of guys in last season. ... They need big help at wide receiver and on the offensive line. ... They started bringing in a lot of junior college guys, which is probably not a good sign. They're looking for a quick one-off fix, but they're going to sacrifice culture and consistency. This is a really hard place to win at; the [Matt] Rhule era is long gone, and they didn't build off of it."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)				
WR	80	**ZAE BAINES (JR.)**	17	John Adams (Jr.)
WR	10	**DANTE WRIGHT (SR.)**	1	Ian Stewart (Jr.)
WR	19	Antonio Jones (Sr.)	86	Xavier Irvin (Fr.)
LT	75	**LUKE WATSON (SO.)**	70	Melvin Siani (Fr.)
LG	66	Chris Smith (Sr.)	50	Jon Fagley (Jr.)
C	68	Kevin Smithwick (So.)	54	Jackson Pruitt (So.)
RG	79	**WISDOM QUARSHIE (SR.)**	54	Jackson Pruitt (So.)
RT	77	Diego Barajas (Sr.)	57	Grayson Mains (So.)
TE	95	Reese Clark (So.)	88	Peter Clarke (Fr.)
QB	11	Forrest Brock (Sr.)	12	Evan Simon (Jr.)
RB	24	**JOQUEZ SMITH (SO.)**	20	E.J. Wilson (Sr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	30	**TRA THOMAS (JR.)**	91	Cam'Ron Stewart (Jr.)
DT	97	**ALLAN HAYE (JR.)**	90	**CONLAN GREENE (SO.)**
DT	55	Chevez Trask (Jr.)		Jason Moore (Jr.)
OLB	34	Diwun Black (Sr.)	15	T.K. Wright (So.)
MLB	11	D.J. Woodbury Sr. (Sr.)	10	Tyquan King (Jr.)
OLB	52	Antwone Santiago (So.)	18	Katin Surprenant (Jr.)
CB	12	Darrell Sweeting (Fr.)	20	Jamel Johnson (So.)
CB	24	Ben Osueke (Sr.)	21	Jaylen Lewis (So.)
S	14	Brenyen Scott (Sr.)	29	Javier Morton (Jr.)
S	19	Andreas Keaton (Sr.)	42	Zyil Powell (Fr.)
S	27	Elijah Deravil (Sr.)	14	Louis Frye (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K		Maddux Trujillo (Sr.)	KR 20	E.J. Wilson (Sr.)
P	37	Dante Atton (So.)	PR 10	Dante Wright (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

TEMPLE OWLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 128 | AAC PREDICTION: 14 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 1-7 AAC

OFFENSE The most impactful departure in the transfer portal in the American Athletic Conference this offseason may have been that of quarterback E.J. Warner from Temple. Warner led the conference with 308 passing yards per game last season before transferring to Rice in the winter. Temple will have a couple of options in replacing him with returner Forrest Brock and Rutgers transfer Evan Simon.

To make things worse, the offensive line is a major concern. The group wasn't particularly impressive last season, particularly in the run game, which mustered only nine touchdowns and averaged a league-worst 95.7 yards per game. Based on the Owls' spring practice, that group still has a long way to go.

DEFENSE Linebacker Jordan Magee is another critical loss for the Owls as he moves on to the professional ranks. Magee led the team in tackles (80) and tackles for a loss (14) while tying for the team lead for sacks with 3.5. Replacing all of that production is a tough mountain to climb.

In the offseason, defensive coordinator Everett Withers installed a 4-3 scheme, which is a departure from what the Owls have done in the last several seasons. Because of that shift, it's tough to say how the existing personnel will adapt, but the move will likely have at least some positive effect given the extra size in the box it will provide. Temple allowed 198.3 rushing yards per game (No. 13 in the AAC), although they did muster 22 sacks, 10th in the AAC.

New faces in the secondary, such as accomplished FCS Western Carolina safety Andreas Keaton, will also help improve a unit that was less than fearsome in 2023. The Owls intercepted just three passes and recovered two fumbles for the fewest turnovers forced in all of FBS.

SPECIALISTS Transfer placekicker Maddux Trujillo hit 38-of-53 field-goal attempts and 128 PATs at FCS Austin Peay over the last three years. Aussie punter Dante Atton is still learning the game after making his first-ever appearance last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Stan Drayton has completely flipped the culture of the program for the better in the last few years. The wins just aren't coming, however, after a third consecutive 3-9 season for the program. Temple hasn't won a road game since September 2021. The transfer portal losses are going to make things even tougher. Figuring out a starting quarterback should be the immediate priority, followed by the shock to the system on defense, which will hopefully be spurred along by the new faces with impact opportunities in the secondary.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Oklahoma
Sept. 7	at Navy
Sept. 14	Coastal Carolina
Sept. 21	Utah State
Sept. 26	Army
Oct. 5	at Connecticut
Oct. 19	Tulsa
Oct. 26	at East Carolina
Nov. 9	at Tulane
Nov. 16	Florida Atlantic
Nov. 23	at UTSA
Nov. 30	North Texas

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 1-7 AAC)

Sept. 2	Akron	W	24-21
Sept. 9	at Rutgers	L	7-36
Sept. 16	Norfolk State	W	41-9
Sept. 23	Miami	L	7-41
Sept. 28	at Tulsa	L	26-48
Oct. 7	UTSA	L	34-49
Oct. 14	at North Texas	L	14-45
Oct. 20	SMU	L	0-55
Nov. 4	Navy	W	32-18
Nov. 11	at South Florida	L	23-27
Nov. 18	at UAB	L	24-34
Nov. 24	Memphis	L	21-45

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Adrian Laing, CB	★★★
2.	Sekou Kromah, DL	★★★
3.	Katin Surprenant, LB	★★★
4.	Denzel Chavis, CB	★★★
5.	Russell Sykes, DL	★★★
6.	Devonta Owens, CB	★★★
7.	Tyler Lepolo, S	★★★
8.	Jamar Taylor Jr., WR	★★★
9.	Tyler Stewart, WR	★★★
10.	Chris Dietrich, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Stan Drayton • Record at School: 6-18 (2 years) • Career Record: 6-18 (2 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Danny Langsdorf • Defensive Coordinator: Everett Withers • Location: Philadelphia, Pa.
Stadium: Lincoln Financial Field (67,594)

TULANE GREEN WAVE

NATIONAL FORECAST: 56 | AAC PREDICTION: 4 | 2023 RECORD: 11-3, 8-0 AAC

OFFENSE Tulane arguably had the best Group of 5 coaching hire of the offseason when they replaced Willie Fritz (now at Houston) with former Troy head coach Jon Sumrall. Right away, Sumrall, also a former Tulane assistant, inspired confidence both with the pieces he was able to keep and the pieces he was able to add to a Tulane team fresh off the best two-year span in program history.

Running back Makhi Hughes won the American Athletic Conference Rookie of the Year award last season after a breakout campaign that saw him rack up a league-best 1,378 rushing yards with seven touchdowns. He'll look to follow it up in his redshirt sophomore season behind an offensive line that will include All-AAC tackle Rashad Green.

At quarterback, replacing AAC Player of the Year and four-year starter Michael Pratt was a priority. Former Oregon backup Ty Thompson joined in the winter to compete for the job with Pratt's backup Kai Horton. Either could be a solid option, but Thompson's status as a former 5-star recruit adds a level of intrigue to him.

DEFENSE Among teams returning to the American in 2024, Tulane had the best scoring defense, allowing 20.5 points per game. As with the offense, several key returning players will be major pieces of the puzzle. Take linebacker Tyler Grubbs, for example. In 2023, Grubbs was a third-team All-AAC pick with three sacks and 7.5 tackles for a loss. There's also senior defensive tackle Patrick Jenkins, who has 8.5 sacks and 20.5 tackles for a loss as a member of the Green Wave after transferring from TCU prior to the 2022 season.

The play of Jenkins, Grubbs, and the rest of the front seven was a huge reason that Tulane had the top rushing defense in the AAC and the No. 16 rushing defense in the nation. The Green Wave allowed 112.7 yards per game on the ground and 3.5 yards per carry last season. With four returning starters in that group, expect the Wave to be stingy once again.

SPECIALISTS Sophomore punter Will Karoll was an All-AAC honorable mention pick last season, averaging 44 yards per punt. Placekicker Lucas Dunker Jr. has the unenviable job of replacing Valentino Ambrosio, who was 21-of-26 on field goals in 2023. Tulane fielded the best kickoff return unit in the AAC last season, with an average of 24.8 yards per return.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Green Wave are entering a new chapter, but the drop-off in wins might not be that significant. Impact transfers on both sides of the ball and a few notable holdovers from the Fritz era should have Sumrall's team right back in the AAC title race.

2023 RESULTS (11-3, 8-0 AAC)

Sept. 2	South Alabama	W	37-17
Sept. 9	Ole Miss	L	20-37
Sept. 16	at Southern Miss	W	21-3
Sept. 23	Nicholls	W	36-7
Sept. 30	UAB	W	35-23
Oct. 13	at Memphis	W	31-21
Oct. 21	North Texas	W	35-28
Oct. 28	at Rice	W	30-28
Nov. 4	at East Carolina	W	13-10
Nov. 11	Tulsa	W	24-22
Nov. 18	at Florida Atlantic	W	24-8
Nov. 24	UTSA	W	29-16
Dec. 2	SMU #	L	14-26
Dec. 27	vs. Virginia Tech %	L	20-41

#AAC Championship %Military Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	SE Louisiana
Sept. 7	Kansas State
Sept. 14	at Oklahoma
Sept. 21	at Louisiana
Sept. 28	South Florida
Oct. 5	at UAB
Oct. 19	Rice
Oct. 26	at North Texas
Oct. 31	at Charlotte
Nov. 9	Temple
Nov. 16	at Navy
Nov. 28	Memphis

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jayden Lewis, CB	★★★
2.	Zycarl Lewis, WR	★★★
3.	Dominic Steward, OL	★★★
4.	Jamauri McClure, RB	★★★
5.	Armani Cargo, CB	★★★
6.	E'zariah Shine, ATH	★★★
7.	Tristen Fortenberry, OT	★★★
8.	Kellen Tasby, QB	★★★
9.	RJ Whitehead, OT	★★★
10.	Guiseann Mirtil, TE	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jon Sumrall • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 23-4 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Joe Craddock, Evan McKissack • Defensive Coordinator: Greg Gasparato, Tayler Polk • Location: New Orleans, La. • Stadium: Yulman Stadium (30,000)

Makhi Hughes

SCOUTING THE GREEN WAVE

"[Jon Sumrall] is a great head coach with a great mind for defense. He rebuilt the Troy culture quickly, and he's brought some really strong talent with him. They're going to look different than Willie Fritz's teams, but there's no reason to think they're going to slide off. The school sort of woke up finally, and now it's an attractive place for coaches. ... [Offensive coordinator Joe] Craddock matches the defensive mentality, and he did a great job with that run game especially. They've also picked up some really strong pieces in the portal to rework that offense. ... It's definitely a transition year, but they're going to be right in that G5 playoff spot conversation for a while. This program has really stepped it up."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR		Shazz Preston (So.)	1	Dontae Fleming (Sr.)
WR	5	Yulkeith Brown (Sr.)	85	Jalen Rogers (So.)
WR		Mario Williams (Sr.)	83	Bryce Bohanon (Jr.)
LT	72	Trey Tuggle (Jr.)	65	Sully Burns (So.)
LG	56	**SHADRE HURST (SO.)**	74	Landry Cannon (Fr.)
C		Vincent Murphy (Sr.)	58	Caleb Thomas (Sr.)
RG	68	**JOSH REMETICH (SR.)**		Dominic Steward (Fr.)
RT	69	**RASHAD GREEN (SR.)**	71	Matt Lombardi (Jr.)
TE	87	**ALEX BAUMAN (JR.)**	89	**REGGIE BROWN (SR.)**
QB		Ty Thompson (Jr.)	12	Kai Horton (Jr.)
RB	21	**MAKHI HUGHES (SO.)**	2	Shaadie Clayton-Johnson (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	3	Angelo Anderson (Sr.)		Deshaun Batiste (Fr.)
DT	94	**ERIC HICKS JR. (SR.)**	95	Adonis Friloux (Sr.)
DT	0	**PATRICK JENKINS (SR.)**	70	Kameron Hamilton (Jr.)
DE	35	Matthew Fobbs-White (So.)	47	AJ Thomas (Fr.)
OLB	13	**TYLER GRUBBS (SR.)**	28	Dickson Agu (Fr.)
MLB	99	**JESUS MACHADO (SR.)**	41	Makai Williams (So.)
OLB		Caleb Ransaw (Jr.)		Chris Rodgers (So.)
CB		Lu Tillery (Sr.)		Kionte Curry (Jr.)
CB		Jayden Lewis (Fr.)	25	Rayshawn Pleasant (So.)
S	32	**BAILEY DESPANIE (JR.)**	23	Kevin Adams III (Fr.)
S		Jalen Geiger (Sr.)		Jack Tchienchou (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	81	Lucas Dunker Jr. (Sr.)	KR	83	Bryce Bohanon (Jr.)
P	49	Will Karoll (So.)	PR	1	Dontae Fleming (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Matthew Hinton-USA TODAY Sports

Anthony Watkins

Matthew Dobbins-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE GOLDEN HURRICANE

"[Kevin] Wilson didn't help his cause by speaking out against NIL. This was a questionable hire when it happened the last cycle, and now the AD is out of there. They signed a really impressive high school class, but what happens if they see success on the field and their head coach won't touch NIL? It just seems dumb. ... They've brought in a lot of good receivers this offseason, and the quarterback made that offense work down the stretch at the end of the season. They're building around some good players and could end up above six wins this season, but it makes you wonder how they're going to establish consistency and fight off transfers if they aren't thinking like a modern program."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	4	Marquis Shoulders (Jr.)		Corey Smith (Fr.)
WR		Jeremiah Ballard (Jr.)		Jack Wright (Sr.)
WR	18	**KAMDYN BENJAMIN (SR.)**	5	**BRAYLIN PRESLEY (JR.)**
LT	78	Daniel Ademisoye (So.)		Kaden Stanton (Fr.)
LG	51	**TAUTAI LIO MARKS (SR.)**	66	Will Morris (Fr.)
C	65	Rey Burnett (Sr.)	52	Kasen Carpenter (Fr.)
RG		Jacob Waller (So.)	54	Walter Young Bear (Fr.)
RT	61	Bennett Ringleb (Fr.)	71	Tanyon Zachary (So.)
TE	47	**ETHAN HALL (SR.)**	87	Luke McGary (So.)
QB	11	Kirk Francis (Fr.)	2	Cardell Williams (So.)
RB	23	**ANTHONY WATKINS (SR.)**	3	Bill Jackson (Jr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	32	Vontroy Malone (So.)	94	Justin Lohrenz (Jr.)
DT		Joe Hjelle (Jr.)	98	Tyler Rich (Fr.)
DT		Amieh Williams (Sr.)	95	R.J. Jackson (So.)
OLB		Myles Jackson (Sr.)	48	**OWEN OSTROSKI (JR.)**
MLB		Gavin Potter (Sr.)		Chris Thompson (Sr.)
OLB		Zach Marcheselli (Sr.)		Stockton Ryan (So.)
CB	5	Keuan Parker (Jr.)	13	NuNu Campbell (So.)
CB	4	**TYREE CARLISLE (SR.)**	7	Xavier Lanier (Sr.)
NB	16	Devin Robinson (Fr.)	12	Donte Burton (Sr.)
S	35	C.J. Turner (Fr.)	10	Sean O'Keefe (Sr.)
S	39	**DAYNE HODGE (JR.)**	13	Malachai Jones (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	18	Michael Slaba (So.)	KR 18	Kamdyn Benjamin (Sr.)
P	29	Angus Davies (So.)	PR 18	Kamdyn Benjamin (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

TULSA GOLDEN HURRICANE

NATIONAL FORECAST: 111 | AAC PREDICTION: 12 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 2-6 AAC

OFFENSE A key returning piece for the Golden Hurricane is sixth-year running back Anthony Watkins, who led the team in rushing last season with 889 yards. He was named to the All-American Athletic Conference third team for his efforts. Tulsa's rushing offense averaged 4.1 yards per carry with 13 touchdowns last season.

The Golden Hurricane managed to give several quarterbacks meaningful reps last season. Braylon Braxton has transferred, leaving Cardell Williams and Kirk Francis as the two with the best shot at winning the full-time starting job. Both, however, have plenty of room to grow. Helping them along in 2024 will be new quarterbacks coach and passing game coordinator Corey Dennis, who is credited as a key figure in the development of Joe Burrow, Justin Fields and Dwayne Haskins during his time at Ohio State.

Between all of Tulsa's quarterbacks, the team averaged 204.7 yards through the air per game in 2023.

DEFENSE Tulsa's defensive stats were only slightly better than those posted by North Texas' defense, which was the worst in the AAC in 2023. The Golden Hurricane ranked above only five FBS teams in allowing 444.7 yards per game. Forcing 21 turnovers, including 11 fumble recoveries, helped limit the damage, but it wasn't enough.

Looking to help that group improve, Tulsa's coaching staff was active in the transfer portal this offseason, bringing in a handful of starting-caliber players. Middle linebacker Gavin Potter was a four-year starter at Kansas before spending last season as a rotational player at Arkansas State. Former Indiana and UCLA edge rusher Myles Jackson is also expected to make an immediate impact; he brings 51 tackles, three fumble recoveries and an interception in his college career. Pieces like Jackson and Potter should be able to apply more pressure on opposing QBs this season.

SPECIALISTS Tulsa will have a new field-goal kicker this season in Michael Slaba, who handled kickoff duties last season. Australian punter Angus Davies had 23 punts land inside the 20-yard line last season, the second-highest total in the AAC. Sixth-year senior Kamdyn Benjamin should take over primary return duties after splitting them with Jordan Ford the last two seasons.

FINAL ANALYSIS A four-win club a year ago, Tulsa lost three of its last four games by seven points or fewer. Four games with three turnovers or more did not help things, either. Head coach Kevin Wilson's second season could have a little more promise if the defensive additions pay off and the quarterback development takes effect sooner rather than later.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Northwestern St.
Sept. 7	at Arkansas St.
Sept. 14	Oklahoma State
Sept. 21	at Louisiana Tech
Sept. 28	at North Texas
Oct. 5	Army
Oct. 19	at Temple
Oct. 26	UTSA
Nov. 2	at UAB
Nov. 14	East Carolina
Nov. 23	at South Florida
Nov. 30	Florida Atlantic

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 2-6 AAC)

Aug. 31	Arkansas-Pine Bluff	W	42-7
Sept. 9	at Washington	L	10-43
Sept. 16	Oklahoma	L	17-66
Sept. 23	at Northern Illinois	W	22-14
Sept. 28	Temple	W	48-26
Oct. 7	at Florida Atlantic	L	17-20
Oct. 19	Rice	L	10-42
Oct. 28	at SMU	L	10-69
Nov. 4	Charlotte (ot)	L	26-33
Nov. 11	at Tulane	L	22-24
Nov. 18	North Texas	L	28-35
Nov. 25	at East Carolina	W	29-27

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Alex Green, WR	★★★
2.	Timothy Carpenter, QB	★★★
3.	Joseph Williams, ATH	★★★
4.	Joshua Smith, TE	★★★
5.	Zachaun Williams, CB	★★★
6.	Corey Smith, WR	★★★
7.	Elijah Green, ATH	★★★
8.	Jaxon Lee, EDGE	★★★
9.	Lloyd Avant, RB	★★★
10.	Will Smith, EDGE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kevin Wilson • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 30-55 (7 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Steve Spurrier Jr. • Defensive Coordinator: Chris Polizzi • Location: Tulsa, Okla.
Stadium: Skelly Field at H.A. Chapman Stadium (30,000)

UAB BLAZERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 110 | AAC PREDICTION: 11 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 AAC

OFFENSE The Trent Dilfer era in Birmingham did not exactly get off to a fast start. However, Dilfer's quarterback expertise from his Elite 11 days is already coming in handy.

A team probably more traditionally known for its running game, UAB got quarterback play from Jacob Zeno that was statistically some of the best the school has ever seen. Zeno set program records for completions (279) and completion percentage (73.6) last season, with his accuracy ranking second in the nation. He finished with 3,126 yards, 20 touchdown passes and nine interceptions. He's one of seven returning starters on offense, including all five linemen.

With a bigger emphasis on the passing game comes an increased need to take proper care of the ball. UAB averaged 29 minutes of possession per game in 2023, down from nearly 32 minutes in 2022. They also turned the ball over 20 times in 2023.

DEFENSE UAB struggled on defense last season, surrendering the second-most points per game in the AAC last year at 36.9. They allowed more than 40 points in seven different games last season. That puts a lot of unnecessary pressure on your offense.

An area that needs improvement is a secondary group that allowed 7.3 yards per completion in 2023 and the most first downs in the AAC. The names left in that group in the wake of several transfers are largely unproven up to this point in their college careers, with the exception of Alabama State transfer Adrian Maddox.

Up front, a name to watch is defensive tackle Kevin Penn. Penn had 4.5 sacks with 43 total tackles in 2023. The Decatur, Ala., native was also credited with four quarterback hurries. Middle linebacker Michael Moore also returns after notching 63 tackles with 5.5 for a loss last season.

SPECIALISTS Blazers punter Patrick Foley is still developing, but he shows promise after 10 of his 41 punts last season went more than 50 yards. Jonah Delange was the Blazers' kickoff specialist last season with 14 touchbacks and likely takes over the field-goal duties this season as well. The Blazers will have to replace dependable return man Jermaine Brown Jr.

FINAL ANALYSIS Last season's 4-8 showing doesn't sit well with the Blazers. Instant success for the Dilfer regime was probably never a realistic expectation, but even he seemed surprised at the learning curve in his first season. Now that the staff has their feet under them, how they respond will say a lot. Getting back to controlling the time of possession and finishing drives will be an important step.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Alcorn State
Sept. 7	at ULM
Sept. 14	at Arkansas
Sept. 28	Navy
Oct. 5	Tulane
Oct. 12	at Army
Oct. 19	at South Florida
Nov. 2	Tulsa
Nov. 9	Connecticut
Nov. 16	at Memphis
Nov. 23	Rice
Nov. 30	at Charlotte

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 AAC)

Aug. 31	North Carolina A&T	W	35-6
Sept. 9	at Georgia Southern	L	35-49
Sept. 16	Louisiana	L	21-41
Sept. 23	at Georgia	L	21-49
Sept. 30	at Tulane	L	23-35
Oct. 7	South Florida	W	56-35
Oct. 14	at UTSA	L	20-41
Oct. 21	Memphis	L	21-45
Nov. 4	Florida Atlantic	W	45-42
Nov. 11	at Navy	L	6-31
Nov. 18	Temple	W	34-24
Nov. 25	at North Texas	L	42-45

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Eddy Toussom, EDGE	★★★
2.	Jaden Ligon, OL	★★★
3.	Joshua Jackson, WR	★★★
4.	Barry Walker, OT	★★★
5.	Kelvin Hill Jr., CB	★★★
6.	Xavier Daisy, WR	★★★
7.	Tyderick Brown, CB	★★★
8.	Kaiki Baker, S	★★★
9.	Adrian Posse, QB	★★★
10.	J'Quan Mason, EDGE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Trent Dilfer • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 4-8 (1 year)
Offensive Coordinator: Alex Mortensen • Defensive Coordinator: Sione Ta'ufo'ou • Location: Birmingham, Ala.
Stadium: Protective Stadium (47,100)

Jacob Zeno

SCOUTING THE BLAZERS

"A lot of us were predicting a total disaster, and when he [head coach Trent Dilfer] started screaming at his own assistants on the sideline, we thought it would happen, but they ended up just being a regular bad program. Maybe he's calmed down and figured it out this season. ... They're not a force in recruiting the way you need to be in a city and region like theirs. The stadium, the money in the program — it was all built to help a head coach keep the best of the rest home in that state and away from any other G5s. That hasn't happened yet. This is still a weird and maybe even dumb hire, considering how good UAB should be with the resources they have."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	1	Amare Thomas (So.)	13	Malachi Holt-Bennett (Sr.)
WR	3	T.J. Jones (Sr.)	9	Brandon Buckhaulter (Jr.)
WR	8	Kam Shanks (Fr.)	0	Iverson Hooks (So.)
LT	66	Jordan Hall (Fr.)	77	Logan Moore (Fr.)
LG	55	**LUKE JONES (SO.)**	70	JonDarius Morgan (Jr.)
C	72	**BRADY WILSON (SR.)**	68	Adam Lepkowski (Jr.)
RG	71	**QUEZ YATES (SR.)**	54	Zaire Flournoy (Jr.)
RT	50	**WILL PARKER (JR.)**	79	**TREY BEDOSKY (JR.)**
TE	48	**BRYCE DAMOUS (SR.)**	11	Dallas Payne (Sr.)
QB	4	**JACOB ZENO (SR.)**	18	Landry Lyddy (So.)
RB	2	Isaiah Jacobs (Jr.)	7	Armoni Goodwin (Jr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	9	Emmanuel Waller (So.)	32	Joker Gill (Sr.)
DT	92	**KEVIN PENN (SR.)**	99	Eamon Smalls (Fr.)
DT	11	LeDarrius Cox (Sr.)	44	Miquon Merriweather (So.)
DE	18	Kendall Johnson (Sr.)	8	**DESMOND LITTLE (SR.)**
OLB	6	**EVERETT ROUSSAW JR. (SO.)**	16	Jax Van Zandt (So.)
MLB	15	Michael Moore (Sr.)	10	Eddy Toussom (Jr.)
OLB	0	Octavious Brothers (Sr.)	25	James Smyre (Jr.)
CB	14	Trey Miles (So.)	29	T'Sai McDaniel (Jr.)
CB	35	Jaylyn Ferguson (So.)	30	Nasir Bashir (So.)
S	3	Ray Thornton III (Sr.)	12	Sirad Bryant (Jr.)
S	7	Adrian Maddox (Jr.)	23	Ricky Lee III (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	39	Jonah Delange (So.)	KR	8	Kam Shanks (Fr.)
P	27	Patrick Foley (Jr.)	PR	5	Mac McWilliams (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Kirby Lee-USA TODAY Sports

Kevorian Barnes

SCOUTING THE ROADRUNNERS

"They're becoming one of the absolute top programs in the Group of 5, especially considering how they've held on to a coach who's so connected in Texas recruiting and doesn't want to leave for just any P4 job. ... They should build a statue for [former quarterback] Frank Harris; he made that program what it is. Just an absolute gamer, seven years. ... Even though they're replacing their best player in program history, they're pretty deep at most positions. The quarterback race seemed wide open in spring, but they're also playing it close. ... They've been hit a bit by the portal, but they're also reloading with some guys coming in. ... Expect them to contend for the conference title again."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	88	De'Corian Clark (Sr.)	84	JJ Sparkman (Sr.)
WR	19	Willie McCoy (Jr.)	15	Chris Carpenter (Sr.)
WR	14	Devin McCuin (So.)	18	David Amador II (So.)
LT	50	Buffalo Kruize (Sr.)	55	Kamar Missouri (Jr.)
LG	**75**	**VENLY TATAFU (SR.)**	78	Jonah Miller (Jr.)
C	66	CJ James (Sr.)	**76**	**LUKE LAPEZE (JR.)**
RG	**53**	**CORY GODINET (JR.)**	73	Demetris Allen (Jr.)
RT	**77**	**MAKAI HART (SR.)**	51	Andrew Alvarado (Jr.)
TE	**84**	**OSCAR CARDENAS (SR.)**	88	Houston Thomas (So.)
QB	13	Owen McCown (So.)	12	Eddie Lee Marburger (Jr.)
RB	**31**	**KEVORIAN BARNES (JR.)**	20	Robert Henry (Sr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	17	Asyrus Simon (Sr.)	44	Ronald Triplette (Jr.)
DT	**90**	**BRANDON BROWN (JR.)**	95	Christian Clayton (Sr.)
DT	**94**	**JOE EVANS (SR.)**	16	Nick Booker-Brown (Jr.)
OLB	40	Jimmori Robinson (Sr.)	33	Nnanna Anyanwu (So.)
MLB	**10**	**MARTAVIUS FRENCH (SR.)**	46	Brevin Randle (Sr.)
OLB	**88**	**JAMAL LIGON (SR.)**	32	Ian Jackson (Jr.)
MONEY	**12**	**DONYAI TAYLOR (SR.)**	13	Owen Pewee (So.)
CB	11	Zah Frazier (Jr.)	28	Zach Morris (Jr.)
CB	25	Denver Harris (Jr.)	32	Davin Martin (Fr.)
S	**21**	**KEN ROBINSON (SR.)**	38	Pig Cage (Jr.)
S	29	Elliott Davison (Sr.)	39	Jermarius Lewis (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	47	Tate Sandell (So.)	KR	15 Chris Carpenter (Sr.)
P	25	Caile Hogan (Jr.)	PR	15 Chris Carpenter (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Danny Wild-USA TODAY Sports

UTSA ROADRUNNERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 53 | AAC PREDICTION: 2 | 2023 RECORD: 9-4, 7-1 AAC

OFFENSE In its first year in the American Athletic Conference, UTSA nearly reached the championship game thanks largely to an offense that tied for fourth in scoring with 31.9 points per game. Repeating that feat is doable, but it comes with the additional challenge of replacing the starting quarterback, top two receivers and multiple offensive linemen. The Roadrunners do, however, return a stable of veteran running backs who contributed to a respectable 4.3 yards per carry as a team last season, including Kevorian Barnes (715 yards rushing in 2023).

Arguably the biggest question mark is what happens under center. Owen McCown, son of longtime NFL quarterback Josh McCown, led the Roadrunners to a win in their 2023 bowl game, but he will need to show growth in his redshirt sophomore season. Redshirt junior Eddie Lee Marburger has also played against some bigger opponents for the Roadrunners over the last two seasons, but he doesn't have the same skill set of someone like now-graduated program legend Frank Harris.

DEFENSE UTSA lost far less to the transfer portal than many of its G5 counterparts. However, the Roadrunners do have to deal with the transfers of two of their best players in linebacker and 2023 AAC Defensive Player of the Year Trey Moore (Texas) and talented corner Kam Alexander (Oregon). Many of the returnees have been veteran rotational pieces who will have increased roles this season. Linebacker Donyai Taylor will be one to watch after earning second-team All-AAC honors last season with 46 tackles, two sacks and an interception.

In 2023, UTSA fielded more of a "bend, don't break" defense. The Roadrunners allowed 24.1 points per game but ranked outside the top 100 in FBS in terms of plays allowed that went for more than 20 yards (63). That propensity for surrendering the big play factored into their red-zone defense, which allowed opponents to score on 35 of 42 trips.

SPECIALISTS UTSA will need to replace some longtime contributors on special teams. Tate Sandell was the Roadrunners' kickoff specialist last season but will have a chance to take on the field-goal duties this season. They will also have to replace all-conference punter Lucas Dean, with the most obvious candidate being Aussie Caile Hogan.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Roadrunners will definitely need some new faces to step up in 2024. In particular, replacing the offensive production will be a challenge, as will filling the void left by the league's best defensive player from last season. Head coach Jeff Traylor has been able to find the next man up since he took the job, and he'll have to do it again at key positions.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Kennesaw State
Sept. 7	at Texas State
Sept. 14	at Texas
Sept. 21	Houston Christian
Sept. 28	at East Carolina
Oct. 12	at Rice
Oct. 19	Florida Atlantic
Oct. 26	at Tulsa
Nov. 2	Memphis
Nov. 15	North Texas
Nov. 23	Temple
Nov. 30	at Army

2023 RESULTS (9-4, 7-1 AAC)

Sept. 2	at Houston	L	14-17
Sept. 9	Texas State	W	20-13
Sept. 15	Army	L	29-37
Sept. 23	at Tennessee	L	14-45
Oct. 7	at Temple	W	49-34
Oct. 14	UAB	W	41-20
Oct. 21	at Florida Atlantic	W	36-10
Oct. 28	East Carolina	W	41-27
Nov. 4	at North Texas	W	37-29
Nov. 11	Rice	W	34-14
Nov. 17	South Florida	W	49-21
Nov. 24	at Tulane	L	16-29
Dec. 19	vs. Marshall #	W	35-17

#Frisco Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kenyan Kelly, S	★★★
2.	Jonah Miller, OT	★★★
3.	Zechariah Robinson, DL	★★★
4.	Joseph Ugwu, OT	★★★
5.	Elijah Newell, S	★★★
6.	Davion Hurth, OL	★★★
7.	Jay'Shaun Johnson, S	★★★
8.	Briley Brown, OL	★★★
9.	Chad Otutu, DL	★★★
10.	Nate Markiewicz, TE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Traylor • Record at School: 39-14 (4 years) • Career Record: 39-14 (4 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Justin Burke • Defensive Coordinator: Jess Loepp • Location: San Antonio, Texas
Stadium: Alamodome (64,000)

PREVIEW

Jalon Daniels, QB, Kansas

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1	UTAH	UTES
2	KANSAS STATE	WILDCATS
3	OKLAHOMA STATE	COWBOYS
4	KANSAS	JAYHAWKS
5	ARIZONA	WILDCATS
6	WEST VIRGINIA	MOUNTAINEERS
7	IOWA STATE	CYCLONES
8	TCU	HORNED FROGS
9	TEXAS TECH	RED RAIDERS
10	UCF	KNIGHTS
11	COLORADO	BUFFALOES
12	BAYLOR	BEARS
13	ARIZONA STATE	SUN DEVILS
14	BYU	COUGARS
15	CINCINNATI	BEARCATS
16	HOUSTON	COUGARS

BIG 12 CHAMPIONSHIP

UTAH
OVER KANSAS STATE

Jay Biggerstaff-USA TODAY Sports

ALL BIG 12-TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	**Jalon Daniels**	Kansas
RB	**Ollie Gordon II**	Oklahoma State
RB	**Tahj Brooks**	Texas Tech
AP	**Travis Hunter**	Colorado
WR	**Tetairoa McMillan**	Arizona
WR	**Kobe Hudson**	UCF
WR	**Brennan Presley**	Oklahoma State
TE	**Brant Kuithe**	Utah
C	**Joe Michalski**	Oklahoma State
OL	**Luke Kandra**	Cincinnati
OL	**Wyatt Milum**	West Virginia
OL	**Dalton Cooper**	Oklahoma State
OL	**Jonah Savaiinaea**	Arizona

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	**Dontay Corleone**	Cincinnati
DL	**Tyler Batty**	BYU
DL	**Junior Tafuna**	Utah
DL	**Lee Hunter**	UCF
LB	**Collin Oliver**	Oklahoma State
LB	**Nickolas Martin**	Oklahoma State
LB	**Karene Reid**	Utah
LB	**Jacob Manu**	Arizona
CB	**Travis Hunter**	Colorado
CB	**Tacario Davis**	Arizona
S	**Jeremiah Cooper**	Iowa State
S	**Aubrey Burks**	West Virginia

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	**Tyler Loop**	Arizona
P	**Jack Bouwmeester**	Utah
KR	**Drae McCray**	Texas Tech
PR	**Josh Cameron**	Baylor

For second- and third-team selections, visit athlonsports.com

Brant Kuithe, TE, Utah

Collin Oliver, LB, Oklahoma State

Fromp top: Rob Gray-USA TODAY Sports; Bryan Terry/The Oklahoman

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Alamo: Kansas State vs. USC

Armed Forces: Iowa State vs. UTSA

Boca Raton: UCF vs. Appalachian State

First Responder: TCU vs. Boston College

Guaranteed Rate: Texas Tech vs. Minnesota

Las Vegas: Arizona vs. Texas A&M

Liberty: West Virginia vs. Auburn

Pop-Tarts: Oklahoma State vs. Clemson

Sun: Colorado vs. North Carolina

Texas: Kansas vs. Oklahoma

Fiesta Bowl (CFP Quarterfinals): Utah vs. Oregon

PREVIEW

Willie Fritz, Houston

Micah Hudson, Texas Tech

COACHING CAROUSEL

ARIZONA
Head Coach: New: Brett Brennan; Old: Jedd Fisch
Offense: New: Dino Babers; Old: Brennan Carroll
Defense: New: Duane Akina; Old: Johnny Nansen

ARIZONA STATE
Offense: New: Marcus Arroyo; Old: Beau Baldwin

BAYLOR
Offense: New: Jake Spavital; Old: Jeff Grimes

CINCINNATI
Defense: New: Nate Fuqua, Tyson Veidt;
Old: Bryan Brown, Nate Fuqua

COLORADO
Offense: New: Pat Shurmur; Old: Sean Lewis
Defense: New: Robert Livingston; Old: Charles Kelly

HOUSTON
Head Coach: New: Willie Fritz: Old: Dana Holgorsen
Offense: New: Kevin Barbay; Old: Dana Holgorsen
Defense: New: Shiel Wood; Old: Doug Belk

IOWA STATE
Offense: New: Taylor Mouser; Old: Nathan Scheelhaase

KANSAS
Offense: New: Jeff Grimes, Jim Zebrowski;
Old: Andy Kotelnicki
Defense: New: Brian Borland, D.K. McDonald;
Old: Brian Borland

KANSAS STATE
Offense: New: Conor Riley, Matt Wells;
Old: Collin Klein

TCU
Defense: New: Andy Avalos; Old: Joe Gillespie

UCF
Offense: New: Tim Harris Jr.; Old: Darin Hinshaw, Herb Hand
Defense: New: Ted Roof, Addison Williams; Old: David Gibbs, Addison Williams

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Micah Hudson	WR	Texas Tech	★★★★★+	20
2.	Jordan Seaton	OT	Colorado	★★★★★+	22
3.	Gus Hawkins	OT	Kansas State	★★★★	52
4.	Peyton Morgan	S	Texas Tech	★★★★	70
5.	Deshawn Warner	Edge	Kansas	★★★★	86
6.	Jacob Ponton	OT	Texas Tech	★★★★	120
7.	Ryan Swanson	TE	BYU	★★★★	130
8.	Ellis Davis	OT	Texas Tech	★★★★	134
9.	Kam Mikell	ATH	Colorado	★★★★	140
10.	Alex Foster	DL	Baylor	★★★★	152

+Consensus 5-star prospect

From top: Troy Taormina-USA TODAY Sports; Jesse Gann/Gainesville Sun

Shedeur Sanders, QB, Colorado

Ollie Gordon II, RB, Oklahoma State

BIG 12 RETURNING LEADERS

PASSING	ATT	COMP	PCT	YDS	TD	INT	AVG/G
Shedeur Sanders, Colorado	430	298	69.3	3,230	27	3	293.6
Alan Bowman, OK State	501	304	60.7	3,460	15	14	247.1
Rocco Becht, Iowa State	367	231	62.9	3,120	23	8	240.0

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Ollie Gordon II, OK State	285	1,732	6.1	21	75	123.7
Tahj Brooks, Texas Tech	290	1,538	5.3	10	46	118.3
RJ Harvey, UCF	226	1,416	6.3	16	92	108.9

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
LaJohntay Wester*, FAU	108	1,168	10.8	8	76	97.3
Travis Hunter, Colorado	57	721	12.6	5	47	80.1
Jayden Higgins, Iowa State	53	983	18.5	6	75	75.6

Nickolas Martin, LB, Oklahoma St.

DEFENSE

TACKLES
Nickolas Martin, Oklahoma State (140); Jacob Manu, Arizona (116)

SACKS
Malachi Lawrence, UCF (7.5); Jacob Manu, Arizona (6.5)

INTERCEPTIONS
Five players tied with 4

**Wester transferred to Colorado in the offseason*

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Texas Tech (23)	5. Kansas State (42)	9. Arizona State (50)	13. Baylor (59)
2. UCF (33)	6. Utah (47)	10. Oklahoma State (51)	14. Houston (61)
3. TCU (37)	7. BYU (48)	11. Cincinnati (52)	15. Colorado (66)
4. Kansas (40)	8. West Virginia (49)	12. Iowa State (58)	16. Arizona (83)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

SEPT. 13
Arizona at Kansas State

SEPT. 21
Utah at Oklahoma State

SEPT. 21
Kansas at West Virginia

SEPT. 28
Oklahoma State at Kansas State

SEPT. 28
Colorado at UCF

SEPT. 28
Arizona at Utah

OCT. 5
West Virginia at Oklahoma State

OCT. 19
Kansas State at West Virginia

OCT. 26
Kansas at Kansas State

NOV. 2
Arizona at UCF

NOV. 9
BYU at Utah

NOV. 30
Kansas State at Iowa State

Sanders: Ron Chenoy-USA TODAY Sports; Gordon: Sarah Phipps/The Oklahoman; Martin: Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

ARIZONA WILDCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 23 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 5 | 2023 RECORD: 10-3, 7-2 PAC-12

OFFENSE Sophomore quarterback Noah Fifita was the Pac-12's Offensive Freshman of the Year, an off-the-bench revelation who completed a school-record 72.4 percent of his passes with 25 touchdowns against six interceptions. He chose to stay at Arizona rather than join former head coach Jedd Fisch at Washington. Junior receiver Tetairoa McMillan caught 90 passes for 1,402 yards, challenging school records in both categories.

Arizona's most uncertain position is running back: Leading rusher Jonah Coleman, who gained 871 yards in the latter half of last season, joined Fisch at Washington. San José State transfer Quali Conley gained 842 yards for new Arizona coach Brent Brennan at SJSU.

The offensive line is a strength even though top NFL draft pick Jordan Morgan departed. Tackles Jonah Savaiinaea and Raymond Pulido, center Josh Baker and guard Wendell Moe are returning regulars.

DEFENSE The Pac-12's leading tackler, junior linebacker Jacob Manu, made 116 tackles last season and was a vital part of the Wildcats' seven-game winning streak to end the season. Also returning are safety Gunner Maldonado, cornerback Tacario Davis and safety Dalton Johnson, who combined for 192 tackles last year.

Three defensive linemen followed ex-UA coach Jedd Fisch to Washington. Four new starters are emerging, notably All-Mountain West Conference lineman Tre Smith, a transfer from San José State, rising star Ta'itai Uiagalelei and JC transfer Chubba Ma'ae. Nickelback Treydan Stukes, who plays three positions, is one of the club's top performers. Deep safety Maldonado is the key piece of an oft-used 3-3-5 alignment.

SPECIALISTS Senior Tyler Loop is among the nation's leading field goal kickers; he is 49-for-57 in his Arizona career, and he has made all 103 extra-point attempts. Running back Rayshon Luke and safety Jai Ayviauynn-Celestine are veterans in the return game.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Wildcats return the core of the squad that beat five Top 25 teams, including Oklahoma in the Alamo Bowl. Fisch left a loaded offense and a strong defense, a tribute to his recruiting after taking over a program that had lost 11 straight games. Fifita is a savvy, accurate passer who made few bad decisions in his nine starts, seven of them victories. He needs to find a No. 2 receiver and a go-to tight end, but Colorado transfer Montana Lemonious-Craig and tight end Keyan Burnett project as capable receivers. Brennan hired two elite-level coordinators, ex-Syracuse head coach Dino Babers and Duane Akina, both of whom were part of Arizona's historic 12-1 team of 1998 and are primed for Act II.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	New Mexico
Sept. 7	Northern Arizona
Sept. 13	at Kansas State
Sept. 28	at Utah
Oct. 5	Texas Tech
Oct. 12	at BYU
Oct. 19	Colorado
Oct. 26	West Virginia
Nov. 2	at UCF
Nov. 15	Houston
Nov. 23	at TCU
Nov. 30	Arizona State

2023 RESULTS (10-3, 7-2 PAC-12)

Sept. 2	Northern Arizona	W	34-3
Sept. 9	at Mississippi St. (ot)	L	24-31
Sept. 16	UTEP	W	31-10
Sept. 23	at Stanford	W	21-20
Sept. 30	Washington	L	24-31
Oct. 7	at USC (ot)	L	41-43
Oct. 14	at Washington St.	W	44-6
Oct. 28	Oregon State	W	27-24
Nov. 4	UCLA	W	27-10
Nov. 11	at Colorado	W	34-31
Nov. 18	Utah	W	42-18
Nov. 25	at Arizona State	W	59-23
Dec. 28	vs. Oklahoma #	W	38-24

#Alamo Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Turran Williams, LB	★★★★
2.	Jordan Washington, RB	★★★
3.	Michael Watkins, OL	★★★
4.	Dylan Tapley, ATH	★★★
5.	Stacy Bey, LB	★★★
6.	Matthew Lado, OT	★★★
7.	Kaho Tuihalamaka, DL	★★★
8.	Brandon Phelps, WR	★★★
9.	Jabari Mann, LB	★★★
10.	Eduwa Okundaye, EDGE	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brent Brennan • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 34-48 (7 seasons)
Offensive Coordinator: Dino Babers • Defensive Coordinator: Duane Akina • Location: Tucson, Ariz.
Stadium: Arizona Stadium (50,782)

Noah Fifita

SCOUTING THE WILDCATS

"It's hard to think of a better roster for a first-year, first-time P4 head coach. Brent [Brennan] is a proven winner at a program [San José State] where it's really hard to sustain winning. There's a lot of negative talk about Arizona with the athletic department's financial issues, and that's certainly something you want to see fixed if you're the new staff, but this is a good team Day 1 for these coaches. ... Keeping [Noah] Fifita and [Tetairoa] McMillan was an absolutely massive swing. Fifita could be the breakout star of the Big 12. [Offensive coordinator] Dino [Babers] knows how to maximize his weapons. Even though [Jedd] Fisch ran more pro-style stuff and Dino is a spread guy, I don't think they're going to overhaul it. On defense they're gonna do the exact same look, and they should. They could really shock some people, and they're definitely a sleeper team to look out for."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	4	**TETAIROA MCMILLAN (JR.)**	6	AJ Jones (So.)
WR	10	Malachi Riley (So.)	14	Rex Haynes (So.)
WR	5	**MONTANA LEMONIOUS-CRAIG (SR.)**	18	Brandon Phelps (Fr.)
LT	79	Raymond Pulido (So.)	60	Alexander Doost (Fr.)
LG	72	**WENDELL MOE (SO.)**	61	Zarius Wells (Fr.)
C	75	**JOSH BAKER (SR.)**	78	Grayson Stovall (So.)
RG	65	Leif Magnuson (Jr.)	55	JT Hand (Jr.)
RT	71	**JONAH SAVAIINAEA (JR.)**	59	Rhino Tapa'atoutai (Fr.)
TE	88	Keyan Burnett (Jr.)	82	Dorian Thomas (Fr.)
QB	11	**NOAH FIFITA (SO.)**	17	Brayden Dorman (Fr.)
RB	7	Quali Conley (Sr.)	21	Rayshon Luke (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

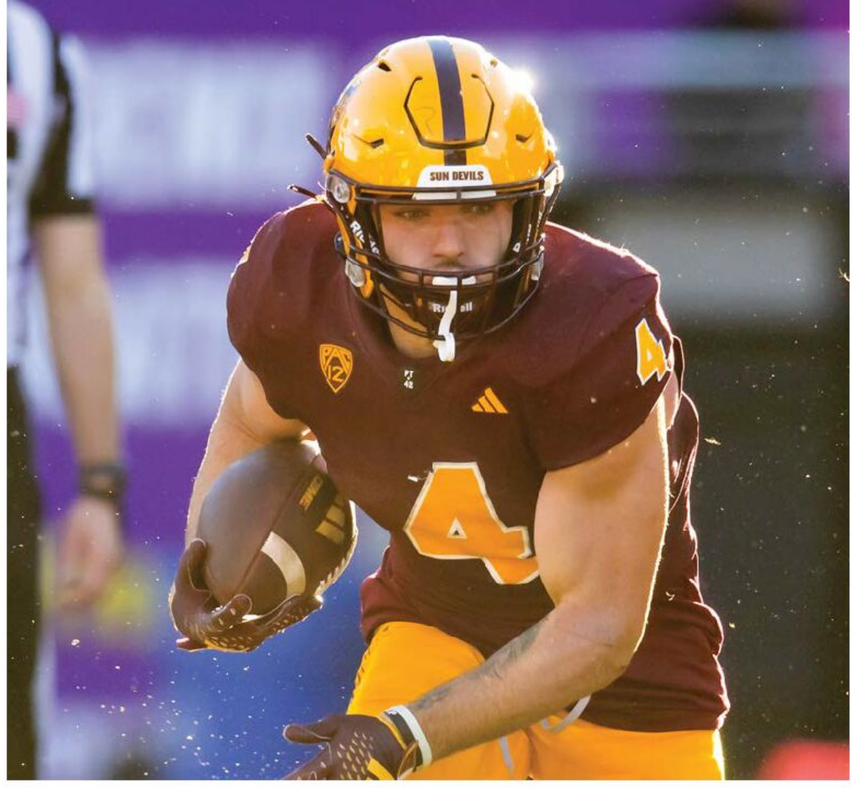
DE	3	Tre Smith (Sr.)	92	Chubba Ma'ae (Sr.)
DT	91	Isaiah Johnson (So.)	41	Julian Savaiinaea (Fr.)
DE	46	Ta'ita'i Uiagalelei (Jr.)	91	Keanu Mailoto (Jr.)
OLB	0	Justin Flowe (Jr.)	42	Dominic Lolesio (Fr.)
ILB	5	**JACOB MANU (JR.)**	8	Sterling Lane II (So.)
OLB	55	Leviticus Su'a (Fr.)	6	Taye Brown (Fr.)
NB	1	**TACARIO DAVIS (JR.)**	14	DJ Warnell Jr. (Sr.)
CB	43	**DALTON JOHNSON (JR.)**	13	Jack Luttrell (Fr.)
CB	12	Genesis Smith (So.)	19	Marquis Groves-Killebrew (So.)
SS	2	**TREYDAN STUKES (JR.)**	26	James Smith (Jr.)
FS	9	**GUNNER MALDONADO (SR.)**	24	Jai Ayviauynn-Celestine (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	33	Tyler Loop (Sr.)	KR	21	Rayshon Luke (Jr.)
P	32	Cash Peterman (Jr.)	PR	24	Jai Ayviauynn-Celestine (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports



Cam Skattebo

SCOUTING THE SUN DEVILS

"You can understand [Kenny Dillingham's] vision, but it's still a ways on down the road. They lost [QB Jaden] Rashada and two of his best targets in spring ball. That's not great, but you can't claim you're surprised by losing that QB; he's operated like a free agent since he got to the college level. ... Sam Leavitt is a solid replacement for Jaden but that's not the same ceiling or skill set, certainly. The defense should be better this year, they've got a mix of some returners and some good pieces from the portal. ... This is a long-term rebuild now with more reduced scholarships after the Herm Edwards stuff. There's some good pieces here, but it's an uphill battle and will be until they can create some consistency and start selling success. I think Kenny's a really good recruiter, and they're making more and more inroads in the state and in Texas. They're thinking long-term."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	0	Jordyn Tyson (So.)	1	Xavier Guillory (Sr.)
WR	7	**MELQUAN STOVALL (SR.)**	17	Kaleb Black (Fr.)
WR	9	**TROY OMEIRE (SR.)**	3	Jake Smith (Sr.)
LT	75	Bram Walden (Jr.)		Jalen Klemm (So.)
LG	62	Ben Coleman (Sr.)	74	**SEAN NA'A (SO.)**
C	79	**LEIF FAUTANU (SR.)**	55	Cade Briggs (Sr.)
RG	53	Shancco Matautia (Jr.)	77	Kyle Scott (Jr.)
RT	58	Max Iheanachor (Sr.)	70	**EMMIT BOHLE (SR.)**
TE		Chamon Metayer (Jr.)	85	Cameron Harpole (Jr.)
QB	10	Sam Leavitt (Fr.)	16	Trenton Bourguet (Sr.)
RB	4	**CAM SKATTEBO (SR.)**	23	Raleek Brown (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	3	Clayton Smith (Jr.)	32	**PRINCE DORBAH (SR.)**
DT	99	C.J. Fite (So.)	91	J.P. Deeter (So.)
DT	98	Jacob Rich Kongaika (Jr.)	38	Jeff Clark (Sr.)
DE	90	Justin Wodtly (Jr.)	15	Elijah O'Neal (Sr.)
LB	44	Keyshaun Elliott (Jr.)	22	Caleb McCullough (Sr.)
LB	30	Zyrus Fiaseu (Jr.)	24	**TATE ROMNEY (SO.)**
CB	26	Javan Robinson (So.)	19	Keith Abney II (So.)
CB	17	Laterrence Welch (Jr.)	29	Tony-Louis Nkuba (Fr.)
NB	21	Cole Martin (So.)	6	Macen Williams (Sr.)
SS	2	Xavion Alford (Jr.)	39	Myles Rowser (Jr.)
FS	7	**SHAMARI SIMMONS (SR.)**	18	Montana Warren (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K		Parker Lewis (Jr.)	KR 23	Raleek Brown (So.)
P		Kanyon Floyd (Fr.)	PR 23	Raleek Brown (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

ARIZONA STATE SUN DEVILS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 67 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 13 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 2-7 PAC-12

OFFENSE The Sun Devils should be improved after a historically bad season in which they used the swinging gate formation and frequently played non-quarterbacks under center due to injuries. To bolster their offensive front, coaches added four FBS transfers. They also return left guard Ben Coleman, who missed last year with an Achilles injury, and right tackle Emmit Bohle, who broke his ankle early in the 2023 schedule

At quarterback, they brought in redshirt freshman Sam Leavitt from Michigan State, who is the likely starter after Jaden Rashada transferred to Georgia. In truth, he may have beaten him out anyway.

ASU is very capable at the skill positions. Wide receiver Jordyn Tyson is a rising star after taking a year to recover from a knee injury late in 2022. Troy Omeire is a big-play threat at 6-foot-4 and 215 pounds. Jake Smith, Melquan Stovall and Xavier Guillory are other talented wideouts. Chamon Metayer's addition at tight end from Cincinnati should help overcome transfer losses. Running back will be better, with a leaner and quicker Cam Skattebo joined by athletic USC transfer Raleek Brown.

DEFENSE Ten or more FBS transfers should be in the two-deep for a defense that looked surprisingly capable in spring ball. The secondary should be a strength, especially at safety, where team MVP Shamari Simmons will be joined by Xavion Alford and New Mexico State transfer Myles Rowser. Oregon transfer Cole Martin is an impact addition at nickel, while Javan Robinson (Washington State) and Laterrence Welch (LSU) are starting candidates at cornerback.

Linebacker has been bolstered by the additions of Keyshaun Elliott, who led New Mexico State in tackles, and Zyrus Fiaseu, who was San Diego State's team MVP last season. Caleb McCullough and Tate Romney have starting experience at the position, which is now relatively deep.

Clayton Smith and Prince Dorbah are good pass rushers at end, with newcomers Jacob Rich Kongaika, Jeff Clark and J.P. Deeter helping to provide more quality options at defensive tackle to go with blossoming C.J. Fite. The Sun Devils should be able to rotate and keep guys fresh.

SPECIALISTS The Sun Devils have good options, between Ohio State transfer Parker Lewis at placekicker and big-legged freshman punter Kanyon Floyd. Brown is potentially a higher-end return specialist.

FINAL ANALYSIS While the Sun Devils won't be world-beaters, it wouldn't be a surprise if they became bowl eligible in their second season under head coach Kenny Dillingham. The overall trend line is on the upswing, as most of their starters won't be seniors, and they've shown they can successfully evaluate and recruit the transfer portal.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Wyoming
Sept. 7	Mississippi State
Sept. 14	at Texas State
Sept. 21	at Texas Tech
Oct. 5	Kansas
Oct. 11	Utah
Oct. 19	at Cincinnati
Nov. 2	at Oklahoma St.
Nov. 9	UCF
Nov. 16	at Kansas State
Nov. 23	BYU
Nov. 30	at Arizona

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 2-7 PAC-12)

Aug. 31	Southern Utah	W	24-21
Sept. 9	Oklahoma State	L	15-27
Sept. 16	Fresno State	L	0-29
Sept. 23	USC	L	28-42
Sept. 30	at California	L	21-24
Oct. 7	Colorado	L	24-27
Oct. 21	at Washington	L	7-15
Oct. 28	Washington State	W	38-27
Nov. 4	at Utah	L	3-55
Nov. 11	at UCLA	W	17-7
Nov. 18	Oregon	L	13-49
Nov. 25	Arizona	L	23-59

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jason Brown, RB	★★★★
2.	Chris Johnson, CB	★★★
3.	Tony-Louis Nkuba, CB	★★★
4.	Rodney Bimage, CB	★★★
5.	Zechariah Sample, WR	★★★
6.	Jayden Fortier, TE	★★★
7.	Kyan McDonald, CB	★★★
8.	Terrell Kim, OL	★★★
9.	Albert Smith, LB	★★★
10.	Plas Johnson, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kenny Dillingham • Record at School: 3-9 (1 year) • Career Record: 3-9 (1 year)
Offensive Coordinator: Marcus Arroyo • Defensive Coordinator: Brian Ward • Location: Tempe, Ariz.
Stadium: Mountain America Stadium (53,599)

BAYLOR BEARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 66 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 12 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 2-7 BIG 12

OFFENSE So much is new about the Baylor offense. The Bears hired former Texas State head coach Jake Spavital as offensive coordinator — one of five new coaches on the offensive staff — and he's brought his up-tempo and high-flying offense to Waco. Spavital's units have finished in the top 20 in the nation in total offense six times in his career.

Baylor brings back its top five wide receivers from last season. Monaray Baldwin is the fastest player on the team and led all pass-catchers with more than 600 yards and four touchdowns last year. Ketron Jackson Jr. figures to fit into the Air Raid much better in his second season with Baylor.

Two-year starting quarterback Blake Shapen transferred to Mississippi State, but the Bears brought in quarterback Dequan Finn, a three-year starter at Toledo who was named MAC Player of the Year last year after throwing for more than 2,600 yards and 22 touchdowns. Sawyer Robertson has the arm talent to fit into Spavital's offense.

DEFENSE For the first time, Baylor head coach Dave Aranda is set to fully have his stamp on the Baylor defense. Aranda took over as defensive play-caller after the Bears finished 3-9 last season. They had one of the worst defenses in the Big 12, allowing a conference-worst 33.3 points per game . The last time Aranda called a defense was for LSU in 2019, when the Tigers won the national championship.

Aranda has also taken a hands-on role with the linebackers, and no player figures to benefit more from that than sixth-year inside linebacker Matt Jones, who led the Bears with 82 tackles and finished tied for second on the team with three sacks. He and transfer linebacker Keaton Thomas look to improve a rushing defense that ranked 115th nationally.

Corner Caden Jenkins was an All-American as a freshman last season, finishing with three interceptions and two fumble recoveries. Questions remain along the defensive line after the top two pass rushers graduated and two interior linemen had to medically retire in the spring.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Isaiah Hankins made 21-of-23 PATs and 18-of-25 field goals, most notably a game-winner at UCF. As a true freshman, punter Palmer Williams averaged more than 42 yards per punt with a long of 53. The Bears added Jamaal Bell, Nevada's all-time leader for kick returns (80) and kick return yardage (1,712), via the portal. Junior running back Richard Reese returned two kickoffs for scores against West Virginia.

FINAL ANALYSIS This is a make-or-break season for Aranda. After losing seven of eight home games and ending last year on a five-game losing streak, he is firmly on the hot seat. With a new offensive outlook and a defense that is made in his image, time will tell if the changes pay off.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Tarleton
Sept. 7	at Utah
Sept. 14	Air Force
Sept. 21	at Colorado
Sept. 28	BYU
Oct. 5	at Iowa State
Oct. 19	at Texas Tech
Oct. 26	Oklahoma State
Nov. 2	TCU
Nov. 16	at West Virginia
Nov. 23	at Houston
Nov. 30	Kansas

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 2-7 BIG 12)

Sept. 2	Texas State	L	31-42
Sept. 9	Utah	L	13-20
Sept. 16	LIU	W	30-7
Sept. 23	Texas	L	6-38
Sept. 30	at UCF	W	36-35
Oct. 7	Texas Tech	L	14-39
Oct. 21	at Cincinnati	W	32-29
Oct. 28	Iowa State	L	18-30
Nov. 4	Houston (ot)	L	24-25
Nov. 11	at Kansas State	L	25-59
Nov. 18	at TCU	L	17-42
Nov. 25	West Virginia	L	31-34

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Alex Foster, DL	★★★★
2.	Joseph Dodds, RB	★★★★
3.	Kristopher Wokomah, S	★★★
4.	Joshua Lair, S	★★★
5.	Jadon Porter, WR	★★★
6.	Keaton Thomas, LB	★★★
7.	Tonga Lolohea, EDGE	★★★
8.	Kyland Reed, LB	★★★
9.	Tristan Santoro, OT	★★★
10.	Kyler Beaty, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dave Aranda • Record at School: 23-25 (4 years) • Career Record: 23-25 (4 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Jake Spavital • Defensive Coordinator: Matthew Powledge • Location: Waco, Texas
Stadium: McLane Stadium (45,140)

Monaray Baldwin

SCOUTING THE BEARS

"It seems like [head coach Dave] Aranda knows that the heat is on with the changes they made on offense. They're back to Air Raid, Texas-style offensive football. It's all-in on the Toledo transfer [Dequan Finn] at quarterback. The receivers were not great last season. They need to fix that and the offensive line. ... Defensively, they're going back to Aranda calling it. They were bland last year, really predictable, and they couldn't generate any pressure. I'm guessing that they're going to be showing a lot of urgency this fall because the school will make a move if they think that this program isn't getting fixed. The question we asked when he got hired was if Aranda could build out a Texas recruiting staff. The overall talent level is starting to answer our question."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (9)

WR	80	Monaray Baldwin (Sr.)	16	HAL PRESLEY (SR.)
WR	11	KETRON JACKSON JR. (SR.)	89	Ashtyn Hawkins (Sr.)
WR	34	JOSH CAMERON (JR.)	20	Jamaal Bell (Sr.)
LT	53	CAMPBELL BARRINGTON (SR.)	79	ALVIN EBOSELE (SO.)
LG	68	Omar Aigbedion (Jr.)	74	KADEN SIERACKI (SO.)
C	72	COLETON PRICE (SO.)	78	Koltin Sieracki (Fr.)
RG	75	Kurt Danneker (Sr.)	62	Ryan Lengyel (Jr.)
RT	58	GAVIN BYERS (SR.)	76	Isaiah Robinson (Fr.)
TE	87	Kelsey Johnson (Jr.)	86	Michael Trigg (Jr.)
QB	12	Dequan Finn (Sr.)	13	Sawyer Robertson (Jr.)
RB	29	RICHARD REESE (JR.)	21	Dominic Richardson (Sr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	35	Jackie Marshall (Jr.)	91	Trey Wilson (So.)
NT	97	COOPER LANZ (JR.)	48	Treven Ma'ae (Sr.)
DE	59	Devonte Tezino (So.)	93	DK Kalu (Fr.)
OLB	55	Garmon Randolph (Sr.)		JaQues Evans (Sr.)
ILB	2	MATT JONES (SR.)	41	Brooks Miller (Sr.)
ILB	40	Keaton Thomas (So.)	44	Josh White (Sr.)
OLB	51	KYLER JORDAN (SO.)	54	Steve Linton (Sr.)
CB	19	CADEN JENKINS (SO.)	22	Reggie Bush (So.)
CB		Lorando Johnson (Sr.)	21	CHATEAU REED (SR.)
SS	16	Kendrick Simpkins (Sr.)	15	Carl Williams IV (So.)
FS	20	DEVIN LEMEAR (JR.)	28	DEVYN BOBBY (JR.)

SPECIALISTS

K	98	Isaiah Hankins (Jr.)	KR	20	Jamaal Bell (Sr.)
P	94	Palmer Williams (So.)	PR	34	Josh Cameron (Jr.)

Returning starters in ***BOLD***

Chris Jones-USA TODAY Sports

Tyler Batty

SCOUTING THE COUGARS

"Last year's hiring of [defensive coordinator] Jay Hill is the big story here because I think that side of the ball could turn a corner this season. They closed out a really strong recruiting class, and they're bringing more guys in over this off-season on that side of the ball. Hill was a really good head coach [at Weber State]; this job is going to showcase what he can do. ... Last year was a good example of a transition to Power 5 or 4 football; you run out of steam, you don't have the depth and you can't plug guys in after injuries. They should be better down the stretch this season."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	**5**	**DARIUS LASSITER (SR.)**	17	Keelan Marion (Jr.)
WR	**2**	**CHASE ROBERTS (SO.)**	13	Jojo Phillips (Fr.)
WR	**0**	**KODY EPPS (SO.)**	82	Parker Kingston (Fr.)
LT	76	Caleb Etienne (Sr.)	74	Trevin Ostler (So.)
LG	**61**	**WEYLIN LAPUAHO (SO.)**	77	Jake Griffin (Fr.)
C	**70**	**CONNOR PAY (SR.)**	68	Peter Falaniko (So.)
RG	51	Sonny Makasini (So.)	72	Joe Brown (Fr.)
RT	**64**	**BRAYDEN KEIM (SR.)**	56	Jake Eichorn (Jr.)
TE	1	Keanu Hill (Sr.)	80	Ryner Swanson (Fr.)
QB	12	Jake Retzlaff (Jr.)	3	Gerry Bohanon (Sr.)
RB	27	LJ Martin (So.)	4	Miles Davis (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	**92**	**TYLER BATTY (SR.)**	93	Blake Mangelson (Sr.)
NT	55	Danny Saili (Jr.)	99	Joshua Singh (Jr.)
DT	94	John Nelson (Sr.)	90	David Latu (Jr.)
DE	**13**	**ISAIAH BAGNAH (SR.)**	59	Logan Lutui (Sr.)
OLB	16	Isaiah Glasker (So.)	18	Ace Kaufusi (So.)
MLB	**2**	**BEN BYWATER (SR.)**	11	Harrison Taggart (So.)
OLB	17	Jack Kelly (Jr.)	54	Siale Esera (So.)
CB	29	Jayden Dunlap (Jr.)	4	Marque Collins (Sr.)
CB	**0**	**JAKOB ROBINSON (SR.)**	19	Mory Bamba (Jr.)
SS	**1**	**MICAH HARPER (JR.)**	3	Raider Damuni (So.)
FS	25	Talan Alfrey (Jr.)	22	Tommy Prassas (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	44	Will Ferrin (Jr.)	**KR**	17	Keelan Marion (Jr.)
P	31	Sam Van Der Haar (So.)	**PR**	82	Parker Kingston (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Kareem Elgazzar/The Enquirer

BYU COUGARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 68 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 14 | 2023 RECORD: 5-7, 2-7 BIG 12

OFFENSE BYU's offense took a major step back in 2023, even when junior college transfer Jake Retzlaff took over for the final four games of the school's first season in the Big 12, all losses. Retzlaff has some competition to retain his starting job in former Baylor and USF quarterback Gerry Bohanon. Head coach Kalani Sitake said at the conclusion of spring practice that the quarterback derby was "neck-and-neck."

Meanwhile, offensive coordinator Aaron Roderick has vowed to fix the team's lack of a viable running attack. Rather than dip into the portal, the Cougars will rely on rising sophomore LJ Martin, converted receiver Miles Davis and Hinckley Ropati, who sustained a season-ending ACL injury in training camp last year, to handle the rushing chores.

Receiver should be a position of strength, as BYU's top five receivers return in 2024, most notably Kody Epps, Darius Lassiter and Chase Roberts.

If their inaugural season in the Big 12 showed anything, it was that Cougars needed to get better in the trenches. As spring camp broke, coaches talked of the need to plumb the transfer portal for OL help to complement center Connor Pay, guard Weylin Lapuaho and tackles Brayden Keim and Caleb Etienne.

DEFENSE Prior to last season, Sitake fired his good friend, defensive coordinator Ilaisa Tuiaki, and brought in Jay Hill from FCS Weber State. Hill's first defense started well, pitching a shutout in the opener against Sam Houston. But when Big 12 games rolled around it, this unit proved to be susceptible to the run, and the league's top running backs feasted on a weak defensive line and inexperienced linebackers. Also, the Cougars couldn't generate a pass rush, tying for dead last in the country in sacks.

Hill hit the junior college ranks hard for defensive linemen and got a couple of his former Weber State stars — linebacker Jack Kelly and cornerback Marque Collins — out of the portal in an effort to add depth and size.

SPECIALISTS BYU's kicking situation looked like a mess after spring camp of 2023, but Boise State transfer Will Ferrin came in and rescued the Cougars with a standout year, making 11-of-14 field-goal attempts in 2024. At punter, BYU will look to replace four-year starter Ryan Rehkow with either his brother (Landon) or Pitt transfer Sam Van Der Haar, an Australian.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Cougars enter the 2024 season on a five-game losing skid. Sitake's squad should be better this year if he can find a capable quarterback and the defense improves against the run. Don't bank on BYU making a bowl game after missing out on postseason play last year for the first time since 2017, and don't be surprised when Sitake's seat heats up if there's another losing season in Provo.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Southern Illinois
Sept. 6	at SMU
Sept. 14	at Wyoming
Sept. 21	Kansas State
Sept. 28	at Baylor
Oct. 12	Arizona
Oct. 18	Oklahoma State
Oct. 26	at UCF
Nov. 9	at Utah
Nov. 16	Kansas
Nov. 23	at Arizona State
Nov. 30	Houston

2023 RESULTS (5-7, 2-7 BIG 12)

Sept. 2	Sam Houston	W	14-0
Sept. 9	Southern Utah	W	41-16
Sept. 16	at Arkansas	W	38-31
Sept. 23	at Kansas	L	27-38
Sept. 29	Cincinnati	W	35-27
Oct. 14	at TCU	L	11-44
Oct. 21	Texas Tech	W	27-14
Oct. 28	at Texas	L	6-35
Nov. 4	at West Virginia	L	7-37
Nov. 11	Iowa State	L	13-45
Nov. 18	Oklahoma	L	24-31
Nov. 25	at OK State (ot)	L	34-40

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ryner Swanson, TE	★★★★
2.	Sani Tuala, EDGE	★★★★
3.	Danny Saili, DL	★★★★
4.	Kinilau Fonohema, EDGE	★★★
5.	Carson Suesue, QB	★★★
6.	Faletau Satuala, S	★★★
7.	Naki Tuakoi, EDGE	★★★
8.	Devoux Tuataga, EDGE	★★★
9.	Sosefo Akuila, LB	★★★
10.	Ikinasio Tupou, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kalani Sitake • Record at School: 61-41 (8 years) • Career Record: 61-41 (8 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Aaron Roderick • Defensive Coordinator: Jay Hill • Location: Provo, Utah
Stadium: LaVell Edwards Stadium (63,470)

CINCINNATI BEARCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 73 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 15 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 1-8 BIG 12

OFFENSE Cincinnati will lean heavily on the run game again this season after ranking fifth in the nation in rushing last season. With veteran running back Corey Kiner running behind the same offensive line that helped put up those 2023 numbers, head coach Scott Satterfield and the Bearcats will attempt to establish the run week in and week out. Ohio State transfer Evan Pyror adds an element of speed and explosiveness in tandem with Kiner's ground-and-pound ability.

Where things get interesting is at quarterback. Indiana transfer Brendan Sorsby comes in with a high ceiling, and in spring practice, he showed flashes, making plays and stretching the field. Add in returning pass-catcher Xzavier Henderson, tight end transfer Joe Royer (Ohio State) and transfer receivers Tony Johnson (FAU) and Tyrin Smith (UTEP), and UC's passing game could look a lot different in 2024.

DEFENSE Led by first-year defensive coordinator Tyson Veidt, Cincinnati's defense will be vastly different. With Dontay Corleone, Eric Phillips, Jack Dingle and Jordan Young the only returning starters, Cincinnati added a lot of help in the defensive backfield and on the defensive line.

Defending the Big 12's high-flying passing games was an issue for the Bearcats last season. Satterfield and his recruiting staff made sure to rectify the situation, bringing in experienced defensive backs like Derrick Canteen, Mekhi Miller, Logan Wilson and Joshua Minkins via the transfer portal. They also added former Ohio State safety Kye Stokes, who is expected to have a major role in the back of Veidt's defense.

Former West Virginia Mountaineer Jared Bartlett comes in with a lot of experience rushing the passer, and he'll do so from the Mike position this season after previously coming off the edge. Eastern Michigan transfer Mikah Coleman adds the prototype pass rusher that the Bearcats were missing out on last season. Returning linebacker Jonathan Thompson is also expected to play an increased role in the middle of Cincinnati's defense.

SPECIALISTS Mason Fletcher returns as one of the best punters in the country, and Carter Brown will do the kicking for Cincinnati for the second year in a row. Fletcher averaged 45 yards per punt last season while playing through a sports hernia injury.

FINAL ANALYSIS Ultimately, Cincinnati's success this season will hinge on Sorsby's ability to lead the offense — assuming he wins the job — and the Bearcats' ability to make explosive plays. While the defense has been reinvigorated, it's unfair to expect it to be one of the best units in the Big 12. But with the influx of experienced defensive backs and overall depth, that side of the ball won't lose Cincinnati many games this season.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Towson
Sept. 7	Pittsburgh
Sept. 14	at Miami (Ohio)
Sept. 21	Houston
Sept. 28	at Texas Tech
Oct. 12	at UCF
Oct. 19	Arizona State
Oct. 26	at Colorado
Nov. 9	West Virginia
Nov. 16	at Iowa State
Nov. 23	at Kansas State
Nov. 30	TCU

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 1-8 BIG 12)

Sept. 2	Eastern Kentucky	W	66-13
Sept. 9	at Pittsburgh	W	27-21
Sept. 16	Miami (Ohio) (ot)	L	24-31
Sept. 23	Oklahoma	L	6-20
Sept. 29	at BYU	L	27-35
Oct. 14	Iowa State	L	10-30
Oct. 21	Baylor	L	29-32
Oct. 28	at Oklahoma State	L	13-45
Nov. 4	UCF	L	26-28
Nov. 11	at Houston	W	24-14
Nov. 18	at West Virginia	L	21-42
Nov. 25	Kansas	L	16-49

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Daniel James, CB	★★★★
2.	Aiden Pastoriza, OL	★★★★
3.	Marqavious Saboor, S	★★★
4.	Marquaze Parker, DL	★★★
5.	Samaj Jones, QB	★★★
6.	Gavin Grover, TE	★★★
7.	Kale Woodburn, WR	★★★
8.	Willie Goodwyn, CB	★★★
9.	Jake Wheelock, OL	★★★
10.	Dakarai Anderson, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Scott Satterfield • Record at School: 3-9 (1 year) • Career Record: 79-57 (11 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Brad Glenn • Defensive Coordinator: Tyson Veidt • Location: Cincinnati, Ohio
Stadium: Nippert Stadium (40,000)

Corey Kiner

SCOUTING THE BEARCATS

"The debut season was basically a disaster for them. But that wasn't the Luke Fickell roster from years past, for better or worse. ... They lacked identity on both sides of the ball. They didn't have outstanding skill pieces; it just looked a little bit messy all around. ... They're trying to rebuild the roster, and Scott [Satterfield] can recruit, but it's an issue where they never really reached their potential at Louisville, and this is a very, very similar job. He's on a big contract with them, so he probably won't feel the heat this season, but they have to represent that they have a plan and a vision moving forward. This has always been a job with a high ceiling for coaches who understand it."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	8	**XZAVIER HENDERSON (SR.)**	3	Evan Prater (Sr.)
WR	4	Tyrin Smith (Sr.)	9	Aaron Turner (Sr.)
WR	0	Tony Johnson (Jr.)	14	Barry Jackson Jr. (Fr.)
LT	75	**JOHN WILLIAMS (SR.)**	74	Phillip Wilder (Sr.)
LG	54	**DARTANYAN TINSLEY (SR.)**	59	Jake Wheelock (Fr.)
C	53	**GAVIN GERHARDT (SR.)**	50	Evan Tengesdahl (Fr.)
RG	67	**LUKE KANDRA (SR.)**	77	Jonathan Harder (So.)
RT	56	**DEONDRE BUFORD (JR.)**	79	Ethan Green (So.)
TE	11	Joe Royer (Jr.)	17	Joey Beljan (Sr.)
QB	2	Brendan Sorsby (So.)	16	Brady Lichtenberg (Jr.)
RB	21	**COREY KINER (SR.)**	6	Evan Pryor (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

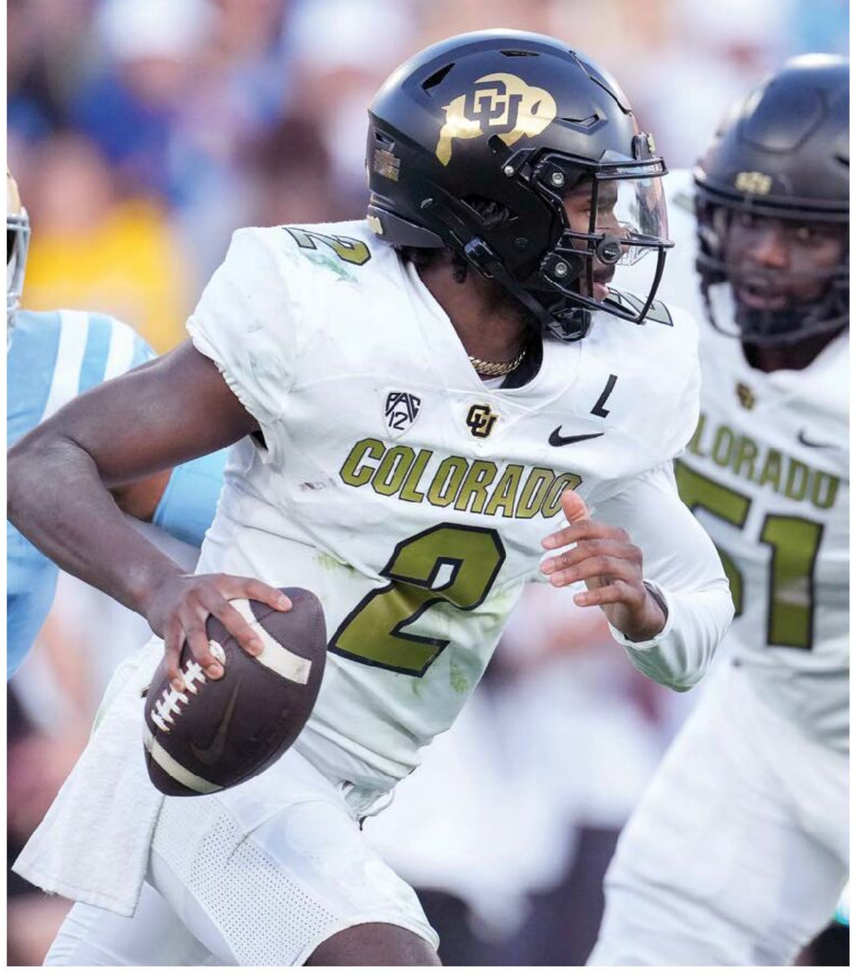
DE	4	Mikah Coleman (Jr.)	24	Darian Varner (Sr.)
DT	2	**DONTAY CORLEONE (JR.)**	90	Jalen Hunt (Sr.)
DE	97	**ERIC PHILLIPS (SR.)**	15	Kameron Wilson (Jr.)
LB	49	**JACK DINGLE (JR.)**	17	Brian Simms III (Fr.)
MIKE	7	Jared Bartlett (Sr.)	12	Brady Drogosh (Fr.)
LB	22	Jonathan Thompson (So.)	31	Simeon Coleman (Fr.)
STAR	20	Mekhi Miller (Sr.)	12	Jiquan Sanks (Fr.)
CB	1	**JORDAN YOUNG (JR.)**	25	Derrick Canteen (Sr.)
CB	8	Ormanie Arnold (So.)	14	Zaravion Johnson (Fr.)
SS	3	Kye Stokes (So.)	0	Joshua Minkins (Sr.)
FS	25	Derrick Canteen (Sr.)	26	Logan Wilson (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	33	Carter Brown (Jr.)	KR	8	Xzavier Henderson (Sr.)
P	31	Mason Fletcher (Sr.)	PR	5	D.J. Taylor (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Ben Queen-USA TODAY Sports



Shedeur Sanders

SCOUTING THE BUFFALOES

"It's gonna be a circus just like last season, so expect the unexpected. The known quantity is at quarterback, and when you look at the kid [Shedeur Sanders] away from the hype and his dad, he can make legit throws and has innate talent and great instincts. ... Expect improvement at skill positions across the board — they're aggressively portaling — but they need to put some studs opposite of [Travis] Hunter. It doesn't matter what noise Prime makes — they cannot have a winning season without a functional run game and a legit offensive line. That's the one position group you can't really portal in one cycle. If they're halfway better there, they'll have a winning season."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	12	**TRAVIS HUNTER (JR.)**	4	Omarion Miller (So.)
WR	5	**JIMMY HORN JR. (SR.)**	10	LaJohntay Wester (Sr.)
WR	14	Will Sheppard (Sr.)	82	Terrell Timmons Jr. (Jr.)
LT	77	Jordan Seaton (Fr.)	72	Ben Reznik (Jr.)
LG	66	Justin Mayers (Sr.)	77	Kareem Harden (Jr.)
C	56	Tyler Brown (Sr.)	52	Cash Cleveland (Fr.)
RG	74	Tyler Johnson (Sr.)	56	Yakiri Walker (Sr.)
RT	67	Kahlil Benson (Jr.)	54	Phillip Houston (Jr.)
TE	81	Sam Hart (Jr.)	13	Sav'ell Smalls (Sr.)
QB	2	**SHEDEUR SANDERS (SR.)**	16	Ryan Staub (Fr.)
RB	29	Micah Welch (Fr.)		Dallan Hayden (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	49	Quency Wiggins (So.)	53	Arden Walker (Jr.)
NT	97	Chidozie Nwankwo (Sr.)	88	Amari McNeill (Jr.)
DT	99	**SHANE COKES (SR.)**		B.J. Green (Sr.)
BUCK	93	Sam Okunlola (So.)	27	Keaten Wade (Jr.)
MLB	20	**LAVONTA BENTLEY (SR.)**	25	Jaylen Wester (Jr.)
WLB	43	**TREVOR WOODS (SR.)**	38	Brendan Gant (Sr.)
CB	8	DJ McKinney (So.)		Colton Hood (Fr.)
CB	12	**TRAVIS HUNTER (JR.)**	34	Nahmier Robinson (Fr.)
NB	24	Preston Hodge (Sr.)	6	Herman Smith III (Sr.)
SS	7	**CAM'RON SILMON-CRAIG (SR.)**	23	Carter Stoutmire (So.)
FS	21	**SHILO SANDERS (SR.)**	26	Adonis Forrest (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	16	Alejandro Mata (Jr.)	KR	5 Jimmy Horn Jr. (Sr.)
P	15	Mark Vassett (Sr.)	PR	10 LaJohntay Wester (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Kirby Lee-USA TODAY Sports

COLORADO BUFFALOES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 50 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 11 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 1-8 PAC-12

OFFENSE Quarterback Shedeur Sanders looks to build on a record-setting 2023 that featured 3,230 passing yards and 27 touchdowns. And that was with Colorado's offensive line giving up a Power-5-worst 56 sacks — an issue that is being addressed with significant additions like Jordan Seaton from IMG Academy.

Travis Hunter was the most electrifying player in college football last year and averaged a whopping 116 snaps per game. Despite missing three games due to a lacerated liver, Hunter finished second on the team with 57 receptions for 721 yards and five touchdowns. He also tied for the team lead with three interceptions and led the team with five pass breakups. Hunter's performance was strong enough to earn him the 2023 Paul Hornung Award, given to the most versatile player in college football. Like Sanders, this will be his final year with the Buffaloes, and both are expected to be off the board among the top 10 picks next year.

Pat Shurmur takes over offensive coordinator duties and brings a pro-style approach. He should make the offense more multidimensional after the Buffs had one of the nation's worst rushing attacks (827 total yards).

DEFENSE Colorado's defense allowed an average of 453.3 yards and 34.8 points per game (both in the bottom 10 nationally). This season promises improvement with the infusion of fresh talent and strategic changes.

Key to their prospects is Hunter, who will continue to anchor the secondary and also step up as a leader. The team welcomes a notable influx of transfers such as Sam Okunlola from Pitt, B.J. Green from Arizona State and Quency Wiggins from LSU — all 4-star defensive linemen expected to make immediate impacts. These additions are part of a larger overhaul that sees Colorado implementing a 4-2-5 scheme under the direction of new defensive coordinator Robert Livingston, whose background as an NFL secondary coach has prepared him for this role.

This will be an improved group, but as with any rebuild, there are questions to be answered in terms of chemistry.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Alejandro Mata, who followed head coach Deion Sanders from FCS Jackson State, nailed 10 of his 12 field-goal attempts, including a game-winner in Tempe against Arizona State. He will be joined for a second straight year by Australian punter Mark Vassett.

FINAL ANALYSIS With the hype of Coach Prime's Power 5 debut behind him, Colorado enters 2024 trying to silence the naysayers, and Sanders will lean on an array of transfers to carry the load once again. Anything short of a postseason bid would be a letdown for the Buffs.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	North Dakota St.
Sept. 7	at Nebraska
Sept. 14	at Colorado St.
Sept. 21	Baylor
Sept. 28	at UCF
Oct. 12	Kansas State
Oct. 19	at Arizona
Oct. 26	Cincinnati
Nov. 9	at Texas Tech
Nov. 16	Utah
Nov. 23	vs. Kansas #
Nov. 29	Oklahoma State

#Kansas City, MO

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 1-8 PAC-12)

Sept. 2	at TCU	W 45-42
Sept. 9	Nebraska	W 36-14
Sept. 16	Colorado State (ot)	W 43-35
Sept. 23	at Oregon	L 6-42
Sept. 30	USC	L 41-48
Oct. 7	at Arizona State	W 27-24
Oct. 13	Stanford (ot)	L 43-46
Oct. 28	at UCLA	L 16-28
Nov. 4	Oregon State	L 19-26
Nov. 11	Arizona	L 31-34
Nov. 17	at Washington State	L 14-56
Nov. 25	at Utah	L 17-23

TOP EIGHT RECRUITS

1.	Jordan Seaton, OT	★★★★★
2.	Kam Mikell, ATH	★★★★
3.	Dre'lon Miller, WR	★★★★
4.	Eric Brantley Jr., EDGE	★★★
5.	Brandon Davis-Swain, DL	★★★
6.	Omar White, DL	★★★
7.	Micah Welch, RB	★★★
8.	Kyeran Garcia, LB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Deion Sanders • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 31-14 (4 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Pat Shurmur • Defensive Coordinator: Robert Livingston • Location: Boulder, Colo.
Stadium: Folsom Field (50,183)

HOUSTON COUGARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 75 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 16 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 2-7 BIG 12

OFFENSE Quarterback Donovan Smith, who passed for nearly 3,000 yards and 22 touchdowns in his first season with Houston, should be ready for the start of camp after labrum surgery in the offseason. He will have a new supporting cast, as the Cougars lost two top receivers (Matthew Golden and Sam Brown) to the portal and must replace four starters on the offensive line, including All-Big 12 left tackle Patrick Paul.

With an emphasis on the run game under new head coach Willie Fritz, Houston will look to improve on its 118.7 yards per game and 10 rushing touchdowns in 2023, both among the worst in the nation. Fritz averaged nearly 44 rushing attempts per game in eight seasons at Tulane, and his teams have consistently been in the top 30 in rushing. The backfield returns intact with Parker Jenkins, Tony Mathis Jr. and Stacy Sneed.

At wide receiver, Joseph Manjack IV and Stephon Johnson — who combined for 70 catches for 854 yards and nine TDs — are the top returners. Redshirt freshman Jonah Wilson, a top recruit in the 2023 class, has been slowed by injuries, while a pair of transfers in Mekhi Mews (Georgia) and 6-foot-6, 265-pound tight end Maliq Carr (Michigan State) are expected to factor into the passing game.

DEFENSE Change is on the way on defense, which isn't necessarily a bad thing after the Cougars ranked 100th or worse in every major statistical category last season. New defensive coordinator Shiel Wood, who had a top-20 defense at Troy two years ago, inherits a unit that will switch to a 3-4 scheme and returns just two starters — free safety A.J. Haulcy (team-high 98 tackles), and middle linebacker Jamal Morris (64 tackles).

Keith Cooper, who joined Fritz from Tulane, and Brandon Mack, coming off a lat injury that limited him to two games in 2023, are the top candidates on the edge. Cornerback Latrell McCutchin, who sat out last season following a transfer from USC, could make an impact from Day 1.

Fritz was especially pleased this spring with the showing at linebacker, a position that adds transfers Michael Batton (ULM) and Corey Platt Jr. (Tulane).

SPECIALISTS Jack Martin is back to handle placekicking duties after going 8-of-14 on field goals (four of the misses were from 48 yards or longer). Freshman Liam Dougherty is the next Australian punter in a successful run of late. Mews is a big-play threat on returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Since reaching the AAC title game in 2021, Houston has taken a step back. A transition period can be expected as Fritz has big questions to address in all three phases. Fritz has been a proven winner at every stop, so patience might be the theme for Houston in 2024.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	UNLV
Sept. 7	at Oklahoma
Sept. 14	Rice
Sept. 21	at Cincinnati
Sept. 28	Iowa State
Oct. 4	at TCU
Oct. 19	vs. Kansas #
Oct. 26	Utah
Nov. 2	Kansas State
Nov. 15	at Arizona
Nov. 23	Baylor
Nov. 30	at BYU

#Kansas City, MO

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 2-7 BIG 12)

Sept. 2	UTSA	W	17-14
Sept. 9	at Rice	L	41-43
Sept. 16	TCU	L	13-36
Sept. 23	Sam Houston	W	38-7
Sept.30	at Texas Tech	L	28-49
Oct. 12	West Virginia	W	41-39
Oct. 21	Texas	L	24-31
Oct. 28	at Kansas State	L	0-41
Nov. 4	at Baylor (ot)	W	25-24
Nov. 11	Cincinnati	L	14-24
Nov. 18	Oklahoma State	L	30-43
Nov. 25	at UCF	L	13-27

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	JayShon Ridgle, WR	★★★★
2.	Darius Washington, EDGE	★★★
3.	DJ Butler, RB	★★★
4.	Maurice Williams, S	★★★
5.	Koby Young, WR	★★★
6.	Kaleb Thomas, TE	★★★
7.	J'Marion Burnette, RB	★★★
8.	Traville Frederick Jr., TE	★★★
9.	Derek Joiner, OL	★★★
10.	DeMarcus Johnson, EDGE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Willie Fritz • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 208-116 (27 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Kevin Barbay • Defensive Coordinator: Shiel Wood • Location: Houston, Texas
Stadium: TDECU Stadium (40,000)

Donovan Smith

SCOUTING THE COUGARS

"Hiring Willie Fritz makes so much sense for this program. Fritz is the ultimate steady hand, just a consistent, hard-nosed football coach, and he's finally getting a job where they want to really support the program at the top level. [Defensive coordinator] Shiel Wood is going to be a head coach soon; they really built a great staff. Expect a lot of the Tulane 3-4. ... If [OC Kevin] Barbay can help [QB] Donovan Smith, and if he's healthy, they have a lot of receiver talent on that roster provided guys don't portal out because of the culture change. They weren't untalented last season by any stretch; they were just sloppy."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	14	Jonah Wilson (Fr.)	28	Anthony Gangi (Jr.)
WR	0	**JOSEPH MANJACK IV (JR.)**	83	Mekhi Mews (Jr.)
WR	12	Stephon Johnson (Jr.)	33	Samuel Padgitt (Fr.)
LT	77	David Nduke (Jr.)	75	Jake Wiley (Sr.)
LG	65	Cayden Bowie (Fr.)	68	Dakota White (Sr.)
C	59	Demetrius Hunter (So.)	61	Thomathan Good (Sr.)
RG	72	**TANK JENKINS (SR.)**	66	Peyton Dunn (Jr.)
RT	58	Shamar Hobdy-Lee (Sr.)	76	Cedric Melton (Sr.)
TE	6	Maliq Carr (Sr.)	82	Matt Byrnes (Jr.)
QB	1	**DONOVAN SMITH (SR.)**	2	Zeon Chriss (So.)
RB	23	**PARKER JENKINS (SO.)**	24	Tony Mathis Jr. (Sr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	5	Keith Cooper (Sr.)	90	Zykeius Strong (Sr.)
NT	93	Xavier Stillman (Jr.)	97	Everitt Rogers (Sr.)
DT	18	Anthony Holmes Jr. (So.)	99	Quindario Lee (Jr.)
DE	13	Brandon Mack (Sr.)	45	Nadame Tucker (Sr.)
LB	25	**JAMAL MORRIS (SR.)**	36	Jalen Garner (Jr.)
LB	44	Michael Batton (Sr.)	9	Corey Platt Jr. (So.)
CB	28	Teagan Wilk (Jr.)	20	Jeremiah Wilson (Jr.)
CB	31	Latrell McCutchin (Jr.)	37	Jamaal Shaw (Fr.)
NB	15	Hershey McLaurin (Sr.)	21	Juwon Gaston (Sr.)
SS	8	Kentrell Webb (So.)	33	Johnsley Barbas (Fr.)
FS	24	**A.J. HAULCY (JR.)**	28	Teagan Wilk (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	41	Jack Martin (Sr.)	KR	83	Mekhi Mews (Jr.)
P		Liam Dougherty (Fr.)	PR	0	Joseph Manjack IV (Jr.)

Returning starters in ***BOLD***

Scott Sewell-USA TODAY Sports

Abu Sama III

SCOUTING THE CYCLONES

"This will be a really telling season for Matt Campbell. Can he rebuild that program in the portal and NIL era? A few years ago, it seemed like his name was out there for every job, and then they fell back to earth. ... They didn't show anything from the new offense in the spring, but I don't think it's going to be a huge departure. That's why you make an internal promotion. ... Their issues are talent-based, not scheme, not culture. They don't have the guys they need year in and out. Are they going to change and adapt to the transfer world? Can you still win a league like ours just relying on the recruit-and-develop system? They added a few pieces this year, so maybe they're changing up."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	13	**JAYLIN NOEL (SR.)**	17	Kai Black (Fr.)
WR	9	**JAYDEN HIGGINS (SR.)**	0	Beni Ngoyi (Fr.)
WR	16	Daniel Jackson (Sr.)	83	Isaiah Alston (Jr.)
LT		Jalen Travis (Sr.)	**75**	**JAMES NEAL (JR.)**
LG	54	**JARROD HUFFORD (SR.)**	70	Trevor Buhr (Fr.)
C	63	**JIM BONIFAS (JR.)**	61	Dylan Barrett (Jr.)
RG	51	**BRENDAN BLACK (SO.)**	79	Deylin Hasert (So.)
RT	66	**TYLER MILLER (SR.)**	50	Tyler Maro (Jr.)
TE	18	Benjamin Brahmer (So.)	84	Gabe Burkle (So.)
QB	3	**ROCCO BECHT (SO.)**	10	JJ Kohl (Fr.)
RB	24	Abu Sama III (So.)	26	Carson Hansen (So.)

DEFENSE (9)

DE	52	**JOEY PETERSEN (SR.)**	88	Ikenna Ezeogu (So.)
NG	95	Domonique Orange (Jr.)	**58**	**J.R. SINGLETON (SR.)**
DE	11	**TYLER ONYEDIM (JR.)**	20	Kenard Snyder (Jr.)
SLB	23	**WILL MCLAUGHLIN (JR.)**	44	Jacob Ellis (Jr.)
MLB	50	Caleb Bacon (Jr.)	0	Zachary Lovett (Jr.)
WLB	47	Kooper Ebel (So.)	**33**	**JACK SADOWSKY V (SO.)**
CB	5	**MYLES PURCHASE (SR.)**	24	Quintin Taylor Jr. (Fr.)
CB	3	Jontez Williams (Sr.)	10	Darien Porter (Sr.)
MS	17	**BEAU FREYLER (SR.)**	29	Drew Surges (So.)
BS	7	**MALIK VERDON (JR.)**	2	Jamison Patton (So.)
FS	4	**JEREMIAH COOPER (JR.)**	19	Ta'Shawn James (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	97	Kyle Konrardy (Fr.)	KR	13	Jaylin Noel (Sr.)
P	80	Tyler Perkins (Jr.)	PR	13	Jaylin Noel (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Chris Jones-USA TODAY Sports

IOWA STATE CYCLONES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 29 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 7 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 6-3 BIG 12

OFFENSE Quarterback Rocco Becht is one of the most intriguing young stars in college football. The Big 12's 2023 Freshman of the Year broke school rookie records for completions, passing yards and passing touchdowns in a season. He is back with a talented cast around him.

Sophomore running back Abu Sama III returns after having a spectacular second half of the season. Sama piled up 544 rushing yards in the final six games, including a 276-yard, three-TD outburst at Kansas State.

Iowa State has two of the top returning pass-catchers in the Big 12. At 6-foot-7, sophomore tight end Benjamin Brahmer is a massive target who set a school record for receptions by a freshmen at his position last year. Senior wide receiver Jayden Higgins, who also had a monstrous second half of 2023, is a future pro. Throw senior Jaylin Noel into the mix, and Becht will have a plethora of options through the air.

With an experienced offensive line and eight starters back on offense, will Iowa State be able to capitalize under first-year offensive coordinator Taylor Mouser?

DEFENSE Iowa State's defense is always solid under veteran coordinator Jon Heacock. With nine starters back, there is no reason to expect a drop-off.

Playing a three-man front, Iowa State needs more pressure on the quarterback in 2024. The Cyclones struggled to get to the passer last season, due in part to the loss of first-round pick Will McDonald. Iowa State added edge rusher Kenard Snyder through the transfer portal. Tyler Onyedim, Domonique Orange and Joey Petersen are all solid veterans up front.

Former walk-on Caleb Bacon will see his role increase at linebacker, while Jack Sadowsky V, Kooper Ebel, Will McLaughlin and Zachary Lovett will all play a lot.

Iowa State is loaded at safety with Jeremiah Cooper and Malik Verdon. Myles Purchase is a nice cornerback, but Jontez Williams and Darien Porter will have to step up after the loss of All-American T.J. Tampa.

SPECIALISTS Redshirt freshman Kyle Konrardy and Florida Atlantic transfer Carter Davis will duel for kicking duties in fall camp. Junior Tyler Perkins has a hold on the punter spot. Noel is a consistent asset in the return game, while Eastern Michigan transfer Jaylon Jackson has kickoff returns for touchdowns in each of the last two seasons.

FINAL ANALYSIS Iowa State should be in the mix to compete for a Big 12 title. Ninth-year head coach Matt Campbell has built a winning culture in Ames, and in a Big 12 conference that is in transition, Iowa State should benefit from Campbell's consistency.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	North Dakota	
Sept. 7	at Iowa	
Sept. 21	Arkansas State	
Sept. 28	at Houston	
Oct. 5	Baylor	
Oct. 12	at West Virginia	
Oct. 19	UCF	
Nov. 2	Texas Tech	
Nov. 9	vs. Kansas #	
Nov. 16	Cincinnati	
Nov. 23	at Utah	
Nov. 30	Kansas State	
	#Kansas City, MO	

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 6-3 BIG 12)

Sept. 2	Northern Iowa	W	30-9
Sept. 9	Iowa	L	13-20
Sept. 16	at Ohio	L	7-10
Sept. 23	Oklahoma State	W	34-27
Sept. 30	at Oklahoma	L	20-50
Oct. 7	TCU	W	27-14
Oct. 14	at Cincinnati	W	30-10
Oct. 28	at Baylor	W	30-18
Nov. 4	Kansas	L	21-28
Nov. 11	at BYU	W	45-13
Nov. 18	Texas	L	16-26
Nov. 25	at Kansas State	W	42-35
Dec. 29	vs. Memphis #	L	26-36
	#Liberty Bowl		

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dominic Overby, WR	★★★★
2.	Dontrell Holt, OL	★★★
3.	Marcus Neal, S	★★★
4.	Jace Gilbert, DL	★★★
5.	David Coffey, S	★★★
6.	Keaton Roskop, TE	★★★
7.	Garret Rutledge, OT	★★★
8.	Brett Eskildsen, WR	★★★
9.	AJ Burton, OL	★★★
10.	Beau Goodwin, LB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Matt Campbell • Record at School: 53-48 (8 years) • Career Record: 88-63 (13 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Taylor Mouser • Defensive Coordinator: Jon Heacock • Location: Ames, Iowa
Stadium: Jack Trice Stadium (61,500)

KANSAS JAYHAWKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 21 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 4 | 2023 RECORD: 9-4, 5-4 BIG 12

OFFENSE If Kansas is going to compete for a Big 12 title, the Jayhawks need a healthy Jalon Daniels at quarterback. The preseason Big 12 Player of the Year a season ago, Daniels played in just three contests after suffering a back injury during the preseason. Kansas' surrounding talent is excellent, including Devin Neal, who is likely to become the Jayhawks' all-time leading rusher. The wide receiver and tight end rooms are packed with proven players.

Former 5-star prospect Logan Brown, a Wisconsin transfer, was expected to help fill out last year's offensive line but didn't play because of injury. He was a standout in the spring at left tackle.

Offensive coordinator Jeff Grimes (recently of Baylor) will try to fill the gap left by Andy Kotelnicki's departure for Penn State. Expect Kansas' offensive system to resemble the Jayawks' recent multiple scheme.

DEFENSE The good news? Kansas' defense took a step forward a year ago and returns a talented back end, led by two of the Big 12's best corner-backs in Cobee Bryant and Mello Dotson. The bad news is that the Jayhawks must replace two of their best defensive linemen, along with the leadership of linebacker Rich Miller and the athletic versatility of Craig Young. Three of the four defensive line spots look solid, including both tackle spots and strong-side defensive end, where Jereme Robinson had 4.5 sacks as a first-year starter last year.

If the pass rushers don't step up, keep an eye on a pair of true freshmen: Dakyus Brinkley, who arrived for the spring, and DJ Warner, the high-est-ranked recruit to sign with Kansas in the recruiting database era.

SPECIALISTS Owen Piepergerdes steps in at kicker for the accurate Seth Keller and brings a stronger leg, but he will be challenged to duplicate Keller's consistency. Australian punter Damon Greaves won the starting job as a true freshman and averaged 39.0 yards per punt, allowing zero net return yards. As return men, Luke Grimm has sure hands and Trevor Wilson more game-breaking ability. It's possible that one of the younger athletes on the team could push his way into a role here.

FINAL ANALYSIS This is it: the Jayhawks' best chance to make a real run at a conference title. Kansas head coach Lance Leipold's team boasts 30 seniors, and most of those players are back from last year's nine-win team that was a few plays away from 11 or 12 victories. Daniels' health will be key, and the Jayhawks will need to mine the portal or develop players to fill in the cracks on defense to get there.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	vs. Lindenwood #
Sept. 7	at Illinois
Sept. 14	vs. UNLV #
Sept. 21	at West Virginia
Sept. 28	vs. TCU %
Oct. 5	at Arizona State
Oct. 19	vs. Houston %
Oct. 26	at Kansas State
Nov. 9	vs. Iowa State %
Nov. 16	at BYU
Nov. 23	vs. Colorado %
Nov.	30 at Baylor

#Kansas City, KS
%Kansas City, MO

2023 RESULTS (9-4, 5-4 BIG 12)

Sept. 1	Missouri State	W	48-17
Sept. 8	Illinois	W	34-23
Sept. 16	at Nevada	W	31-24
Sept. 23	BYU	W	38-27
Sept. 30	at Texas	L	14-40
Oct. 7	UCF	W	51-22
Oct. 14	at Oklahoma State	L	32-39
Oct. 28	Oklahoma	W	38-33
Nov. 4	at Iowa State	W	28-21
Nov. 11	Texas Tech	L	13-16
Nov. 18	Kansas State	L	27-31
Nov. 25	at Cincinnati	W	49-16
Dec. 26	vs. UNLV #	W	49-36

#Guaranteed Rate Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	DJ Warner, EDGE	★★★★
2.	Austin Alexander, S	★★★★
3.	Dakyus Brinkley, EDGE	★★★
4.	Jalen Todd, CB	★★★
5.	Isaiah Marshall, QB	★★★
6.	Damani Maxson, S	★★★
7.	Jonathan Kamara, LB	★★★
8.	Harry Stewart, RB	★★★
9.	David Abajian, OL	★★★
10.	Carter Lavrusky, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Lance Leipold • Record at School: 17-21 (3 years) • Career Record: 163-60 (17 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Jeff Grimes • Defensive Coordinator: Brian Borland • Location: Lawrence, Kan.
Stadium: David Booth Kansas Memorial Stadium (47,000)

Jalon Daniels

SCOUTING THE JAYHAWKS

"The school locking down Lance [Leipold] is the biggest move of their entire offseason. He is going to be rumored for everything that opens, but they're aiming to win the league and go to the playoff. At that program, from where it started, that is nothing short of amazing. This coaching staff has created one of the great-est turnaround stories in college football. ... Replacing Andy [Kotelnicki] with [Jeff] Grimes [as offensive coordinator] is more about how Grimes will acclimate to the KU system. [Jalon] Daniels is a proven talent at quarterback, and they have some great running backs. This is a season where they should be considered a Big 12 title contender. They have depth, experience and talent."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	2	**LAWRENCE ARNOLD (SR.)**	13	Keaton Kubecka (Fr.)
WR	0	Quentin Skinner (Sr.)	5	Doug Emilien (Jr.)
WR	11	**LUKE GRIMM (SR.)**	7	Trevor Wilson (Sr.)
LT	52	Logan Brown (Jr.)	75	Calvin Clements (Fr.)
LG	54	**MICHAEL FORD JR. (SR.)**	55	Darrell Simmons Jr. (Jr.)
C	53	Shane Bumgardner (Sr.)	73	Dre Doiron (Jr.)
RG	70	Kobe Baynes (Jr.)	59	Nolan Gorczyca (Jr.)
RT	77	**BRYCE CABELDUE (SR.)**	71	James Livingston (Fr.)
TE	45	Trevor Kardell (Sr.)	47	**JARED CASEY (SR.)**
QB	6	**JALON DANIELS (JR.)**	15	Cole Ballard (Fr.)
RB	4	**DEVIN NEAL (SR.)**	20	Daniel Hishaw Jr. (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

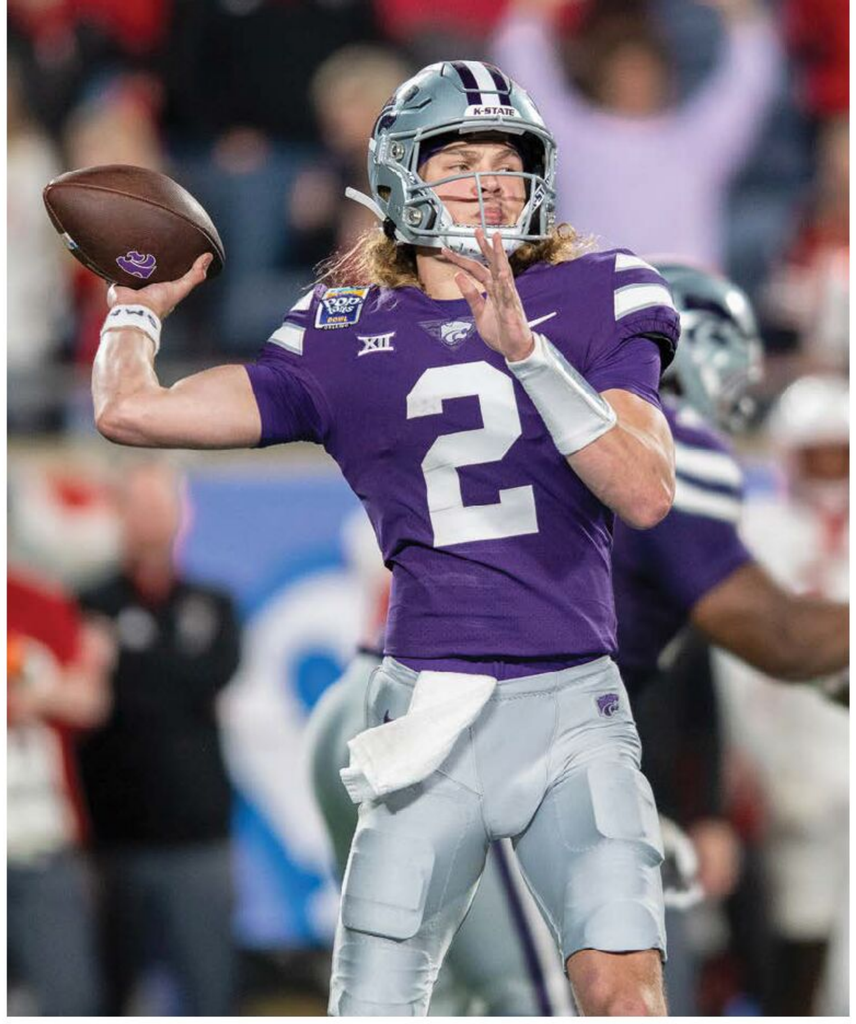
DE	90	**JEREME ROBINSON (SR.)**	95	Dylan Wudke (Sr.)
DT	52	**D.J. WITHERS (JR.)**	58	Javier Derritt (Sr.)
DT	92	Tommy Dunn (Jr.)	97	Kenean Caldwell (Jr.)
DE	13	Dylan Brooks (Jr.)	45	Dean Miller (Jr.)
WLB	28	**JB BROWN (JR.)**	6	Taiwan Berryhill Jr. (Sr.)
MLB	44	Cornell Wheeler (Sr.)	19	Tristian Fletcher (Jr.)
HAWK	10	Jayson Gilliom (Jr.)	34	Alex Raich (Sr.)
CB	2	**COBEE BRYANT (SR.)**	24	Damarius McGhee (Jr.)
CB	3	**MELLO DOTSON (SR.)**	29	Jameel Croft Jr. (Fr.)
S	5	O.J. Burroughs (Sr.)	14	Jalen Dye (Jr.)
S	4	**MARVIN GRANT (SR.)**	11	Devin Dye (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	34	Owen Piepergerdes (Jr.)	KR	7	Trevor Wilson (Sr.)
P	95	Damon Greaves (So.)	PR	11	Luke Grimm (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Jay Biggerstaff-USA TODAY Sports



Avery Johnson

SCOUTING THE WILDCATS

"Losing [former offensive coordinator] Collin Klein is a big deal, but Matt Wells has a ton of experience. If you're looking for a noticeable change, it will probably come in how they build out the passing game around [QB] Avery Johnson. Keeping him from transferring out after losing the offensive coordinator is a huge win for them; it puts them at the top half of the new league for sure. ... [Chris] Klieman has done a really fantastic job blending the reality of recruiting and the portal to the K-State identity. They're still great at developmental talent and finding those hidden players, but they're out fighting for stars, too."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	1	**JAYCE BROWN (SO.)**	8	Ty Bowman (Sr.)
WR	10	Keagan Johnson (Jr.)	12	Tre Spivey (Fr.)
WR	0	Jadon Jackson (Sr.)	14	Dante Cephas (Sr.)
LT	71	Easton Kilty (Sr.)	79	Devin Vass (Fr.)
LG	69	Taylor Poitier (Sr.)	53	Drake Bequeaith (So.)
C	75	Sam Hecht (Jr.)	66	Michael Capria (So.)
RG	54	**HADLEY PANZER (SR.)**	56	Andrew Leingang (Jr.)
RT	77	**CARVER WILLIS (SR.)**	78	John Pastore (So.)
TE	86	Garrett Oakley (So.)	83	Will Swanson (Sr.)
QB	2	Avery Johnson (So.)	7	Jacob Knuth (So.)
RB	31	**DJ GIDDENS (JR.)**		Dylan Edwards (So.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	38	**BRENDAN MOTT (SR.)**	91	Jordan Allen (Fr.)
NT	99	**USO SEUMALO (SR.)**	56	Damian Ilalio (Jr.)
DE	8	Chiddi Obiazor (Fr.)	39	Travis Bates (So.)
WLB	41	**AUSTIN MOORE (SR.)**	23	Asa Newsom (Fr.)
MLB	31	Jake Clifton (Jr.)	45	Austin Romaine (So.)
SLB	32	**DESMOND PURNELL (JR.)**	28	Rex Van Wyhe (So.)
CB	1	Keenan Garber (Sr.)	5	Justice James (Sr.)
CB	10	**JACOB PARRISH (JR.)**	29	Kanijal Thomas (So.)
SS	19	**VJ PAYNE (JR.)**	12	Nickendre Stiger (Sr.)
FS	21	**MARQUES SIGLE (SR.)**	2	Colby McCalister (So.)
JS	20	Jordan Riley (Sr.)	36	Jack Fabris (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	17	Chris Tennant (Sr.)	KR	10 Keagan Johnson (Jr.)
P	35	Simon McClannan (Fr.)	PR	6 Sterling Lockett (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Jeremy Reper-USA TODAY Sports

KANSAS STATE WILDCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 17 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 2 | 2023 RECORD: 9-4, 6-3 BIG 12

OFFENSE For the third time since he arrived in Manhattan in 2019, head coach Chris Klieman has a new offensive coordinator. To replace Collin Klein, who left for the same role at Texas A&M, Klieman promoted offensive line coach Conor Riley. Also joining the staff to mentor the quarterbacks is former Texas Tech and Utah State head coach Matt Wells.

Quarterback Avery Johnson provides a nice security blanket as players and coaches adjust. Johnson arrived a year ago as perhaps the most consequential prospect that the Wildcats had ever signed. His first career start at quarterback came in the win over NC State in the Pop-Tarts Bowl, and he also posted five rushing TDs as a backup against Texas Tech.

He will be flanked by star running back DJ Giddens, who ran for 1,226 yards and 10 touchdowns last year. Three of the main cogs at receiver also return in Jadon Jackson, Jayce Brown and Keagan Johnson, and the Wildcats also add transfer Dante Cephas from Penn State.

Four multi-year starters depart across the offensive front, and Ben Sinnott is off to the NFL after being one of the best tight ends in the Big 12 each of the last two seasons.

DEFENSE Coaches are most excited about what they have at defensive end and in the secondary. The depth at defensive end is overwhelming. Linebackers Austin Moore and Desmond Purnell have 244 career tackles between them. K-State coaches feel like they have two All-Big 12-caliber safeties in Marques Sigle and VJ Payne, and Ball State transfer Jordan Riley is one of the better pickups in the entire conference. The Wildcats will play a lot of man coverage this year because of that group's speed but also because of experienced cornerbacks Keenan Garber and Jacob Parrish.

Kansas State has annually fielded a top-five defense in the Big 12 under coordinator Joe Klanderman in terms of points per possession allowed, and the Wildcats have the personnel to do the same in 2024.

SPECIALISTS Longtime kick and punt returner Phillip Brooks has departed. Look for his replacements to be Keagan Johnson and Sterling Lockett. Redshirt freshman Simon McClannan inherits the punting duties. And though he has had a tumultuous beginning to his career, kicker Chris Tennant improved in 2023 and will enter the season as the starter.

FINAL ANALYSIS Given that K-State upgraded at quarterback and has skill-position talent, the Wildcats could be dangerous. If the offensive line holds up, they should be able to pair an effective offense with an experienced defense and challenge for a second Big 12 title in three years.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Tennessee-Martin
Sept. 7	at Tulane
Sept. 13	Arizona
Sept. 21	at BYU
Sept. 28	Oklahoma State
Oct. 12	at Colorado
Oct. 19	at West Virginia
Oct. 26	Kansas
Nov. 2	at Houston
Nov. 16	Arizona State
Nov. 23	Cincinnati
Nov. 30	at Iowa State

2023 RESULTS (9-4, 6-3 BIG 12)

Sept. 2	SE Missouri State	W	45-0
Sept. 9	Troy	W	42-13
Sept. 16	at Missouri	L	27-30
Sept. 23	UCF	W	44-31
Oct. 6	at Oklahoma State	L	21-29
Oct. 14	at Texas Tech	W	38-21
Oct. 21	TCU	W	41-3
Oct. 28	Houston	W	41-0
Nov. 4	at Texas (ot)	L	30-33
Nov. 11	Baylor	W	59-25
Nov. 18	at Kansas	W	31-27
Nov. 25	Iowa State	L	35-42
Dec. 28	vs. NC State #	W	28-19

#Pop-Tarts Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Gus Hawkins, OT	★★★★
2.	Trae Davis, WR	★★★★
3.	Malcolm Alcorn-Crowder, DL	★★★★
4.	Dante Thomas, CB	★★★★
5.	Blake Barnett, QB	★★★
6.	Jacques Spradley-Demps, WR	★★★
7.	Kaedin Massey, OT	★★★
8.	De Von Rice, RB	★★★
9.	Kyle Rakers, OL	★★★
10.	John Price, RB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Chris Klieman • Record at School: 39-24 (5 years) • Career Record: 111-37 (12 years)
Offensive Coordinators: Conor Riley, Matt Wells • Defensive Coordinator: Joe Klanderman • Location: Manhattan, Kan.
Stadium: Bill Snyder Family Stadium (50,000)

OKLAHOMA STATE COWBOYS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 19 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 3 | 2023 RECORD: 10-4, 7-2 BIG 12

OFFENSE A span of 12 months flipped Oklahoma State's script from unknown and uneasy to veteran and viable. Ollie Gordon II turned away portal promises from premium programs to return after a breakout season as the nation's leading rusher, readying for a run at a Heisman candidacy. Quarterback Alan Bowman is back for a seventh season of college football after solidifying Oklahoma State's offense last fall and will command an attack with a variety of options. The offensive line ranks as one of the most experienced in college football history, featuring six redshirt super seniors and a redshirt senior. What a narrative shift from 2023, when the Cowboys were reeling from massive losses to the transfer portal and picked seventh in the Big 12 media preseason poll.

Gordon surged onto the scene last fall, romping for 1,732 yards and 21 touchdowns. He claimed the Doak Walker and Earl Campbell Tyler Rose awards and was a unanimous All-American and Big 12 Offensive Player of the Year. Bowman can find comfort in handing off to his star running back — or throwing to a proven receiver corps led by Brennan Presley and Rashod Owens, who combined for 164 catches, 1,886 yards and 11 TDs.

DEFENSE While the defense boasts 10 returning starters, the group needs to be better for the team to reach its lofty goals. Oklahoma State ranked No. 86 in scoring defense (28.6 ppg) and No. 111 in pass efficiency defense. Those are hardly championship-caliber stats. Still, there's hope for improvement, as many key returners look to gain traction.

Nick Martin enjoyed a breakout, earning All-Big 12 honors at linebacker and finishing sixth nationally with 140 tackles. Safeties Kendal Daniels and Trey Rucker also topped 100 tackles.

The biggest questions loom up front, where the Cowboys lack a standout. Newcomer Obi Ezeigbo starred at defensive end for Division II Gannon University, totaling 108 tackles and 14 sacks, but he must prove that those numbers can translate to the Big 12.

SPECIALISTS The Cowboys will look to Logan Ward to replace Groza Award semifinalist Alex Hale in the placekicking role. Hudson Kaak and Wes Pahl return after splitting the punting chores. Presley is a dangerous threat in the return game.

FINAL ANALYSIS Oklahoma State overcame a sluggish start in 2023, building momentum that culminated in an appearance in the Big 12 title game and 10 wins. With a star in Gordon II leading a veteran roster, Mike Gundy's Cowboys could make a bid to become the Big 12's premium program, minus SEC-bound Texas and Oklahoma.

2023 RESULTS (10-4, 7-2 BIG 12)

Sept. 2	Central Arkansas	W	27-13
Sept. 9	at Arizona State	W	27-15
Sept. 16	South Alabama	L	7-33
Sept. 23	at Iowa State	L	27-34
Oct. 6	Kansas State	W	29-21
Oct. 14	Kansas	W	39-32
Oct. 21	at West Virginia	W	48-34
Oct. 28	Cincinnati	W	45-13
Nov. 4	Oklahoma	W	27-24
Nov. 11	at UCF	L	3-45
Nov. 18	at Houston	W	43-30
Nov. 25	BYU (ot)	W	40-34
Dec. 2	vs. Texas #	L	21-49
Dec. 27	vs. Texas A&M %	W	31-23

#Arlington %Texas Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	South Dakota St.
Sept. 7	Arkansas
Sept. 14	at Tulsa
Sept. 21	Utah
Sept. 28	at Kansas State
Oct. 5	West Virginia
Oct. 18	at BYU
Oct. 26	at Baylor
Nov. 2	Arizona State
Nov. 9	at TCU
Nov. 23	Texas Tech
Nov. 29	at Colorado

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Tre Griffiths, WR ★★★
2. Temerrick Johnson, EDGE ★★★
3. Rodney Fields, RB ★★★
4. Landyn Cleveland, S ★★★
5. David Kabongo, S ★★★
6. Maealiuaki Smith, QB ★★★
7. Luke Webb, OL ★★★
8. Caleb Hackleman, OT ★★★
9. Nuku Mafi, OL ★★★
10. Willie Nelson, CB ★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Gundy • Record at School: 166-79 (19 years) Career Record: 166-79 (19 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kasey Dunn • Defensive Coordinator: Bryan Nardo • Location: Stillwater, Okla. • Stadium: Boone Pickens Stadium (60,000)

Ollie Gordon II

SCOUTING THE COWBOYS

"Some guys were writing [Mike] Gundy off for dead last season, but he's a hell of a coach. They gutted their way through that one. ... [Offensive coordinator Kasey] Dunn and [defensive coordinator Bryan] Nardo both being back help with the consistency they built towards the end of the last season. The running back [Ollie Gordon II] is an absolute stud, maybe a Heisman guy, and [QB Alan] Bowman is a vet. The offense is fine; it really comes down to how much better the defense can get to put them in the conference title race or not. They were easy to get off their reads and fits last season; they really struggled with tempo. If they can improve, and the consistency in coaching helps that, then OSU could be a conference title contender."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (10)

WR	80	**BRENNAN PRESLEY (SR.)**	81	Camron Heard (Fr.)
WR	88	De'Zhaun Stribling (Jr.)	83	Cale Cabbiness (Sr.)
WR	10	**RASHOD OWENS (SR.)**	2	Talyn Shettron (So.)
LT	61	**JAKE SPRINGFIELD (SR.)**	75	Jakobe Sanders (Fr.)
LG	67	**COLE BIRMINGHAM (SR.)**	68	Taylor Miterko (Sr.)
C	66	**JOE MICHALSKI (SR.)**	51	Austin Kawecki (Fr.)
RG	74	**PRESTON WILSON (SR.)**	**73**	**JASON BROOKS JR. (JR.)**
RT	71	**DALTON COOPER (SR.)**	77	Noah McKinney (Fr.)
QB	7	**ALAN BOWMAN (SR.)**	6	Zane Flores (Fr.)
RB	0	**OLLIE GORDON II (JR.)**	4	AJ Green (Sr.)
FB	38	Jake Schultz (Sr.)	86	Tyler Foster (Sr.)

DEFENSE (10)

DE	56	Xavier Ross (Sr.)	92	Obi Ezeigbo (Sr.)
NT	93	**COLLIN CLAY (SR.)**	**97**	**JUSTIN KIRKLAND (JR.)**
DT	96	**KODY WALTERSCHEID (SR.)**	71	Aden Kelley (So.)
LB	44	Justin Wright (Sr.)	33	Donovan Stephens (So.)
LB	30	**COLLIN OLIVER (SR.)**	32	Gabe Brown (Fr.)
LB	4	**NICK MARTIN (SO.)**	22	Jeff Roberson (Sr.)
CB	2	**KORIE BLACK (SR.)**	10	Kale Smith (Jr.)
CB	3	**CAM SMITH (SO.)**	23	Kenneth Harris (Sr.)
S	5	**KENDAL DANIELS (SO.)**	12	Kam Franklin (Fr.)
S	9	**TREY RUCKER (SR.)**	6	Lyrik Rawls (So.)
S	7	**CAMERON EPPS (SO.)**	11	Dylan Smith (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	19	Logan Ward (Jr.)	KR	80	Brennan Presley (Sr.)
P	29	Hudson Kaak (So.)	PR	80	Brennan Presley (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Ben Queen-USA TODAY Sports

Josh Hoover

Jerome Miron-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE HORNED FROGS

"Pretty big case of a title run hangover here last year. The truth about Sonny [Dykes] is that they weren't as good as the '22 team, and the program isn't as bad as the '23 season. The truth is closer to what they'll do this season when the roster really belongs to this staff. ... They're moving away from their 3-3-5. [Defensive coordinator] Andy [Avalos] is going to want to rush four and shake up their personnel. They seemed to spend the spring focusing on that and holding back on offense. ... If they can find a QB, they'll be fine this season. It's just been a lot of big swings with this program the last two years."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	3	**SAVION WILLIAMS (SR.)**	87	Blake Nowell (Sr.)
WR	88	Eric McAlister (Jr.)	16	Dylan Wright (Sr.)
WR	7	**JP RICHARDSON (SR.)**	13	Major Everhart (So.)
LT	58	Bless Harris (Sr.)	56	Ben Taylor-Whitfield (So.)
LG	55	Remington Strickland (Jr.)		Cade Bennett (Jr.)
C	51	**COLTIN DEERY (JR.)**		James Brockermeyer (Jr.)
RG	62	Carson Bruno (Jr.)	77	Robby Rochester (Jr.)
RT	71	Mike Nichols (Sr.)	54	Quinton Harris (So.)
TE	9	Drake Dabney (Sr.)	81	Chase Curtis (Sr.)
QB	10	**JOSH HOOVER (SO.)**	19	Ken Seals (Jr.)
RB	4	Cam Cook (So.)	17	Trent Battle (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	97	**PAUL OYEWALE (SO.)**	54	Nana Osafo-Mensah (Sr.)
DT	91	Tymon Mitchell (Sr.)	95	Markis Deal (Fr.)
DT	90	**CALEB FOX (SR.)**	42	Zachary Chapman (Fr.)
LB	11	Devean Deal (Jr.)	9	Marcel Brooks (Sr.)
LB	3	Kaleb Elarms-Orr (Jr.)	0	**SHAD BANKS JR. (SR.)**
LB	4	**NAMDI OBIAZOR (SR.)**	57	**JOHNNY HODGES (JR.)**
CB	13	JaTravis Broughton (Sr.)	7	Channing Canada (Jr.)
CB	6	LaMareon James (Sr.)	14	Dre Seldon Jr. (Jr.)
NB	1	Abe Camara (Sr.)	22	Jordan Lester (Fr.)
S	23	Richard Toney Jr. (Jr.)	2	Jamel Johnson (So.)
S	21	**BUD CLARK (JR.)**	29	Cam Smith (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K		Kyle Lemmermann (Fr.)	KR 13	Major Everhart (So.)
P	31	Ethan Craw (Jr.)	PR 7	JP Richardson (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

TCU HORNED FROGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 43 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 8 | 2023 RECORD: 5-7, 3-6 BIG 12

OFFENSE Just one year removed from appearing in both the Big 12 and College Football Playoff National Championship games, TCU's offense went from a strength to a weakness. Chandler Morris was unable to get things going at quarterback, leading head coach Sonny Dykes to turn to Josh Hoover as the starter. Hoover provided a more steady hand and also got some much-needed experience that should translate well this season.

It also helps that the Horned Frogs will be returning two of their three top pass-catchers in Savion Williams and JP Richardson, who combined for 87 catches for 1,109 yards and seven receiving touchdowns. To add to that dynamic duo, the Frogs went out and landed Boise State transfer Eric McAlister, who at 6-foot-3 gives Hoover another massive target to throw to.

The expectation is that Cam Cook, Trent Battle and Nate Palmer will carry the load at running back following Emani Bailey's departure, but the offensive line is still the biggest question mark for this unit. The offense will be as good as the reconstructed line allows it to be.

DEFENSE It is an out with the old, in with the new situation on defense as Joe Gillespie is out as defensive coordinator and Andy Avalos is in. The former Boise State head coach is expected to change up the defense and bring a more aggressive approach to the team. Look for Cal transfer Kaleb Elarms-Orr to be a staple in the box at linebacker for Avalos' defense.

The secondary also will look brand new after the Frogs ranked 11th in the conference in pass defense in 2023. If this defense can apply more pressure on the quarterback, not get beat as much in the passing game and create turnovers after ranking No. 115 in the country in takeaways, it should be much improved.

SPECIALISTS The Horned Frogs will be fielding both a new kicker and punter this season. Ethan Craw comes over from Pro Kick Academy in Australia to handle the punting duties. At kicker, they will turn to freshman Kyle Lemmermann, who was ranked as one of the best kickers in the country as a high schooler. Richardson, who is always dynamic in space, should handle the punt returning duties, while the electric Major Everhart will again return kicks.

FINAL ANALYSIS TCU's sudden decline in 2023 caught most people by surprise, but realistically, the Frogs should bounce back in 2024. They have the weapons on offense, they added talent to the secondary on defense and the scheme changes should do wonders. If they get high-level quarterback play, the Frogs could make a Big 12 title push.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 30	at Stanford
Sept. 7	LIU
Sept. 14	UCF
Sept. 21	at SMU
Sept. 28	vs. Kansas #
Oct. 4	Houston
Oct. 19	at Utah
Oct. 26	Texas Tech
Nov. 2	at Baylor
Nov. 9	Oklahoma State
Nov. 23	Arizona
Nov. 30	at Cincinnati

#Kansas City, MO

2023 RESULTS (5-7, 3-6 BIG 12)

Sept. 2	Colorado	L	42-45
Sept. 9	Nicholls	W	41-6
Sept. 16	at Houston	W	36-13
Sept. 23	SMU	W	34-17
Sept. 30	West Virginia	L	21-24
Oct. 7	at Iowa State	L	14-27
Oct. 14	BYU	W	44-11
Oct. 21	at Kansas State	L	3-41
Nov. 2	at Texas Tech	L	28-35
Nov. 11	Texas	L	26-29
Nov. 18	Baylor	W	42-17
Nov. 24	at Oklahoma	L	45-69

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Gekyle Baker, WR	★★★★
2.	Devondre McGee, CB	★★★★
3.	Hauss Hejny, QB	★★★★
4.	Wesley Harvey, OT	★★★★
5.	Travis Jackson, EDGE	★★★
6.	Nate Palmer, RB	★★★
7.	Tobias Steppes, OT	★★★
8.	Dozie Ezukanma, WR	★★★
9.	Julian Knox, ATH	★★★
10.	Jeremy Payne, RB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Sonny Dykes • Record at School: 18-9 (2 years) • Career Record: 89-72 (13+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Kendal Briles • Defensive Coordinator: Andy Avalos • Location: Fort Worth, Texas
Stadium: Amon G. Carter Stadium (47,000)

TEXAS TECH RED RAIDERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 44 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 9 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 5-4 BIG 12

OFFENSE Headlined by the returning duo of starting quarterback Behren Morton and 1,500-yard rusher Tahj Brooks, Tech's offense could take a major step, even after going under a complete revamp on the offensive line and in the tight end group and wide receiver corps.

It will all start up front for the Red Raiders, who hired long-time Washington State offensive line coach Clay McGuire. Four new line starters were brought in during the offseason, a group headlined by Toledo transfer guard Vinny Sciury and Memphis transfer guard Davion Carter, two of the highest-rated interior offensive linemen in the portal.

Morton's receiving corps is led by 5-star freshman Micah Hudson, an instant-impact player. He is joined by Washington State transfer Josh Kelly, who is coming off a strong season (61 rec., 923 yards, eight TDs).

Tech's tight end group has added Arizona State transfer Jalin Conyers, a native of Gruver, Texas, who mentioned his strong relationship with Morton as the major reason for his transfer to Lubbock.

DEFENSE Coordinator Tim DeRuyter has quite the task as he attempts to build on his strong two-year tenure in Lubbock. DeRuyter's unit saw significant roster turnover this offseason.

Texas Tech went to the portal to replenish the troops up front. The newcomers, headlined by highly touted Rice transfer De'Braylon Carroll, hope to maintain a healthy level of production at the position.

At linebacker, Texas Tech has an excellent duo returning in Jacob Rodriguez and Ben Roberts. Rodriguez is coming off an injury-riddled season in 2023 but is one of the most impactful defenders in the conference when healthy. Roberts earned Freshman All-America honors and was the lone rookie in the country with more than 100 total tackles in 2023.

The secondary has lost three of five starters from the 2023 season. C.J. Baskerville sticks at boundary safety after a solid first season in Lubbock following his transfer from San Diego State.

SPECIALISTS Punter Austin McNamara had four excellent years in Lubbock. The Red Raiders brought in Weber State transfer Jack Burgess to replace him; Burgess posted a better average per punt (47.2) than McNamara (46.3) in 2023. Placekicker Gino Garcia was a strong presence throughout much of the season after a rocky start in 2023.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Joey McGuire has endured significant roster turnover for the first time in his short tenure in Lubbock, but he has brought in enough talent to replenish the roster and help the Red Raiders compete for a Big 12 championship in 2024.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Abilene Christian
Sept. 7	at Washington St.
Sept. 14	North Texas
Sept. 21	Arizona State
Sept. 28	Cincinnati
Oct. 5	at Arizona
Oct. 19	Baylor
Oct. 26	at TCU
Nov. 2	at Iowa State
Nov. 9	Colorado
Nov. 23	at Oklahoma St.
Nov. 30	West Virginia

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 5-4 BIG 12)

Sept. 2	at Wyoming (ot)	L	33-35
Sept. 9	Oregon	L	30-38
Sept. 16	Tarleton	W	41-3
Sept. 23	at West Virginia	L	13-20
Sept. 30	Houston	W	49-28
Oct. 7	at Baylor	W	39-14
Oct. 14	Kansas State	L	21-38
Oct. 21	at BYU	L	14-27
Nov. 2	TCU	W	35-28
Nov. 11	at Kansas	W	16-13
Nov. 18	UCF	W	24-23
Nov. 24	at Texas	L	7-57
Dec. 16	vs. California #	W	34-14

#Independence Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Micah Hudson, WR	★★★★★
2.	Peyton Morgan, S	★★★★
3.	Jacob Ponton, OT	★★★★
4.	Ellis Davis, OT	★★★★
5.	Will Hammond, QB	★★★★
6.	Cheta Ofili, EDGE	★★★★
7.	Maurice Rodrigues, OT	★★★★
8.	Cameron Dickey, RB	★★★★
9.	J'Koby Williams, RB	★★★★
10.	Edward Smith, EDGE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Joey McGuire • Record at School: 15-11 (2 years) • Career Record: 15-11 (2 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Zach Kittley • Defensive Coordinator: Tim DeRuyter • Location: Lubbock, Texas
Stadium: Jones AT&T Stadium (60,454)

Tahj Brooks

SCOUTING THE RED RAIDERS

"They've lost a ton of production on defense; that really jumps out at you. This season is going to test the staff's ability to develop their guys. It's Year 3, so all the hype about being better tied in with Texas high schools has to start showing up. ... Offensively, it's hard to criticize their scheme or the overall production because it seems like they're always getting a backup QB ready to play after an injury. They lost all their good receiver talent to the portal, so there's a lot of rebuilding to do there. ... Best-case scenario is that they cobble together a line from the portal to help out that running back [Tahj Brooks] because he's a legit dude."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	1	Micah Hudson (Fr.)	8	**COY EAKIN (SO.)**
WR	5	Caleb Douglas (Jr.)	4	Jordan Brown (Sr.)
WR	18	Josh Kelly (Sr.)	10	Drae McCray (Sr.)
LT	79	Sterling Porcher (Sr.)	77	Maurice Rodriques (Jr.)
LG	71	Vinny Sciury (Sr.)	64	Jurrien Loftin (So.)
C	76	**CALEB ROGERS (SR.)**	56	Davion Carter (Sr.)
RG	56	Davion Carter (Sr.)	54	Kaden Carr (Fr.)
RT	75	Ty Buchanan (Jr.)	67	Dalton Merryman (Jr.)
TE	12	Jalin Conyers (Sr.)	9	Johncarlos Miller II (Jr.)
QB	2	**BEHREN MORTON (JR.)**	7	Cameran Brown (So.)
RB	28	**TAHJ BROOKS (SR.)**	0	Cam'Ron Valdez (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	14	**JOSEPH ADEDIRE (JR.)**	19	Dylan Spencer (So.)
DT	52	De'Braylon Carroll (Sr.)	5	Quincy Ledet Jr. (Sr.)
DT	8	E'maurion Banks (Sr.)	91	James Hansen (Sr.)
DE	17	Isaac Smith (So.)	96	Amier Washington (Fr)
MLB	10	Jacob Rodriguez (Jr.)	3	Bryce Ramirez (Sr.)
WLB	13	**BEN ROBERTS (SO.)**	42	John Curry (Fr.)
STAR	7	Brenden Jordan (So.)	1	A.J. McCarty (Jr.)
CB	0	**BRAYLN LUX (SR.)**	4	Maurion Horn (So)
CB	2	Jalon Peoples (So)	22	Devynn Cromwell (Jr.)
BS	9	**C.J. BASKERVILLE (SR.)**	20	Marcus Ramon-Edwards (Fr.)
FS	25	Chapman Lewis (So.)	28	Jordan Sanford (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Gino Garcia (Sr.)	KR	10	Drae McCray (Sr.)
P	41	Jack Burgess (Jr.)	PR	10	Drae McCray (Sr.)

Returning starters in ***BOLD***

Michael C. Johnson-USA TODAY Sports

Kobe Hudson

SCOUTING THE KNIGHTS

"KJ Jefferson was the no-brainer QB transfer of the offseason. He's going to thrive in [Gus Malzahn's] system, and there won't be any adjustment needed from either side. ... [New defensive coordinator] Ted Roof is more of a buddy-hire; he definitely lost his fastball at OU, but Malzahn has had a lot of success at UCF by keeping his guys locked in at all the key coaching positions. ... They're getting better and better in recruiting, Gus has given them what the administration built for a long time — that real shot at being another power team in the state of Florida. They've upped their game in every way."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	2	**KOBE HUDSON (SR.)**	80	Trent Whittemore (Sr.)
WR	3	**XAVIER TOWNSEND (JR.)**	8	Bredell Richardson (Fr.)
WR	11	Chauncey Magwood (Jr.)	19	Jarrad Baker (Sr.)
LT	78	**AMARI KIGHT (SR.)**	59	Keyon Cox (Fr.)
LG	76	Adrian Medley (Sr.)	62	Jabari Brooks (Sr.)
C	52	Caden Kitler (So.)	54	Waltclaire Flynn Jr. (Fr.)
RG	72	**MARCELLUS MARSHALL (SR.)**	55	Cameron Kinnie (Sr.)
RT	69	Paul Rubelt (Sr.)	73	Wes Dorsey (Sr.)
TE	5	Randy Pittman Jr. (So.)	44	Evan Morris (Sr.)
QB	1	KJ Jefferson (Sr.)	10	Dylan Rizk (Fr.)
RB	7	**RJ HARVEY (SR.)**	0	Johnny Richardson (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	51	Malachi Lawrence (Jr.)	33	Kaven Call (So.)
DT	5	**RICKY BARBER (SR.)**	44	Matthew Alexander (Jr.)
DT	2	**LEE HUNTER (JR.)**	55	John Walker (So.)
DE	15	Daylan Dotson (Sr.)	6	Isaiah Nixon (Fr.)
LB	32	Ethan Barr (Sr.)	14	Jesiah Pierre (Sr.)
LB	3	Deshawn Pace (Sr.)	24	Xe'ree Alexander (So.)
CB	0	**BRANDON ADAMS (SR.)**	27	Chasen Johnson (Fr.)
CB	1	Ja'Cari Henderson (So.)	7	Antione Jackson (So.)
NB	13	Ladarius Tennison (Sr.)	4	Braeden Marshall (So.)
S	8	**DEMARI HENDERSON (JR.)**	29	William Wells (Sr.)
S	12	Bryon Threats (Sr.)	10	Quadric Bullard (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	35	Colton Boomer (Jr.)	KR	0 Johnny Richardson (Sr.)
P	40	Mitch McCarthy (Jr.)	PR	3 Xavier Townsend (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Scott Sewell-USA TODAY Sports

UCF KNIGHTS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 48 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 10 | 2023 RECORD: 6-7, 3-6 BIG 12

OFFENSE UCF head coach Gus Malzahn says he felt like he hit a home run when he landed former Arkansas quarterback KJ Jefferson from the transfer portal. Malzahn was looking for a veteran to replace John Rhys Plumlee, and he found it in Jefferson, a three-year starter for the Razorbacks with 39 career starts. His build and skill set have often been compared to one of Malzahn's former quarterbacks, Cam Newton.

Running back RJ Harvey rushed for 1,416 yards in 2023, a total that ranks No. 3 all-time in UCF's record books. With Javon Baker off to the NFL, Kobe Hudson becomes UCF's de facto No. 1 wide receiver. Last year, he closely trailed Baker in receptions (44) and yards (900) but was first on the team with eight touchdown receptions. The offensive line is headlined by left tackle Amari Kight.

DEFENSE UCF's defense was not up to the task during the team's Big 12 debut, particularly vs. the run, prompting Malzahn to make a change at defensive coordinator. He looked to veteran coach Ted Roof, with whom he worked during Auburn's 2010 national championship season.

UCF also went big on experience in the transfer portal, bringing in proven starters such as linebacker Ethan Barr (Vanderbilt), linebacker/safety Deshawn Pace (Cincinnati) and cornerback Ladarius Tennison (Ole Miss).

The strength of the unit, though, could be at defensive tackle, led by multi-year starters Ricky Barber and Lee Hunter.

Defensive end Malachi Lawrence had a breakout season in 2023, finishing second on the team with 7.5 sacks along with 10.5 tackles for a loss to earn All-Big 12 Honorable Mention status.

Brandon Adams, a starter at cornerback since his freshman year in 2021, anchors the secondary.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Colton Boomer followed a big freshman debut with a monster start to 2023, connecting on a school-record four field goals, including the walk-off winner to beat Boise State on the road. Mitch McCarthy, a 27-year-old Australian, returns for his third season as punter. Xavier Townsend has been a reliable presence at punt returner, a job he's held since his freshman season in 2022.

FINAL ANALYSIS UCF was the only Big 12 newcomer to reach a bowl game last season, which seems like a successful benchmark considering the upgrade in competition. Optimism is high to take a big step forward. If Jefferson can effectively lead the offense and the defensive changes click, UCF could be a sleeper team to contend in the new-look Big 12.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	New Hampshire
Sept. 7	Sam Houston
Sept. 14	at TCU
Sept. 28	Colorado
Oct. 5	at Florida
Oct. 12	Cincinnati
Oct. 19	at Iowa State
Oct. 26	BYU
Nov. 2	Arizona
Nov. 9	at Arizona State
Nov. 23	at West Virginia
Nov. 29	Utah

2023 RESULTS (6-7, 3-6 BIG 12)

Aug. 31	Kent State	W	56-6
Sept. 9	at Boise State	W	18-16
Sept. 16	Villanova	W	48-14
Sept. 23	at Kansas State	L	31-44
Sept. 30	Baylor	L	35-36
Oct. 7	at Kansas	L	22-51
Oct. 21	at Oklahoma	L	29-31
Oct. 28	West Virginia	L	28-41
Nov. 4	at Cincinnati	W	28-26
Nov. 11	Oklahoma State	W	45-3
Nov. 18	at Texas Tech	L	23-24
Nov. 25	Houston	W	27-13
Dec. 22	vs. Georgia Tech #	L	17-30

#Gasparilla Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kylan Fox, TE	★★★
2.	Jaylen Heyward, S	★★★
3.	Frankie Arthur, RB	★★★
4.	Jakob Gude, S	★★★
5.	EJ Colson, QB	★★★
6.	Bredell Richardson, WR	★★★
7.	DJ McCormick, LB	★★★
8.	Marcus Downs, DL	★★★
9.	Kason Stokes, WR	★★★
10.	Waltclaire Flynn Jr., OL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Gus Malzahn • Record at School: 24-16 (3 years) • Career Record: 101-54 (12 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Tim Harris Jr., Darin Hinshaw, Herb Hand • Defensive Coordinator: Ted Roof • Location: Orlando, Fla. Stadium: FBC Mortgage Stadium (45,301)

UTAH UTES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 14 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 1 | 2023 RECORD: 8-5, 5-4 PAC-12

OFFENSE The Utah offense in 2023 was a shell of the unit that helped lead the team to back-to-back Pac-12 titles in the two seasons prior. The main reason was the absence of star quarterback Cameron Rising, who blew out his knee in the Rose Bowl the prior year. His top target, tight end Brant Kuithe, missed the season as well.

Rising and Kuithe are both back in 2024, and the Utes' offense added a major big-play threat in USC transfer Dorian Singer, who was named to the AP All-Pac-12 first team in 2022 at Arizona. They could very well end up forming one of the best trios in college football, and while the running back room lost Ja'Quinden Jackson, the Utes still have an impressive stable of backs to throw at opponents, including Micah Bernard, who missed 11 games last season with an off-the-field injury.

They should also regain their dynamism in the passing game and will be worlds better than the 166 yards per game and 15 total scores that they mustered last season through the air.

DEFENSE The Utes have always prided themselves on hard-nosed defense, and last season was no exception, even with all of the injuries, as they surrendered just 19.3 points per game (tied for 18th in the nation). They return eight starters and have lured talent via the portal to help fill the voids left in the secondary, adding Georgia Tech transfer Kenan Johnson and Michigan transfer Cameron Calhoun.

The biggest question for this unit is how the Utes will make up for the 12 sacks they lost with Jonah Elliss' departure for the NFL. Logan Fano should generate a ton of pressure, as will linebacker Lander Barton, who will likely be moved all over the front.

Bottom line: Utah should have one of the stingiest units in the Big 12.

SPECIALISTS The Utes return punter Jack Bouwmeester, who had a major impact on field position last season, as he was able to down 20 punts inside the opposing team's 20. They will also return kicker Cole Becker, who showcased a pretty big leg, hitting a 51-yarder. Starting wide receivers Mykah Pittman and Money Parks should also handle the return duties.

FINAL ANALYSIS Utah may be new to the Big 12, but the Utes may also have the best team in the conference. They return one of the best quarterbacks in the sport, and they have added more weapons around him. Defensively, they always have a stingy unit, and that will continue in 2024. Realistically, anything short of a College Football Playoff berth would be a letdown, assuming they don't have major injury issues like they did last season.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Southern Utah
Sept. 7	Baylor
Sept. 14	at Utah State
Sept. 21	at Oklahoma St.
Sept. 28	Arizona
Oct. 11	at Arizona State
Oct. 19	TCU
Oct. 26	at Houston
Nov. 9	BYU
Nov. 16	at Colorado
Nov. 23	Iowa State
Nov. 29	at UCF

2023 RESULTS (8-5, 5-4 PAC-12)

Aug. 31	Florida	W	24-11
Sept. 9	at Baylor	W	20-13
Sept. 16	Weber State	W	31-7
Sept. 23	UCLA	W	14-7
Sept. 29	at Oregon State	L	7-21
Oct. 14	California	W	34-14
Oct. 21	at USC	W	34-32
Oct. 28	Oregon	L	6-35
Nov. 4	Arizona State	W	55-3
Nov. 11	at Washington	L	28-35
Nov. 18	at Arizona	L	18-42
Nov. 25	Colorado	W	23-17
Dec. 23	vs. Northwestern#	L	7-14

#Las Vegas Bowl

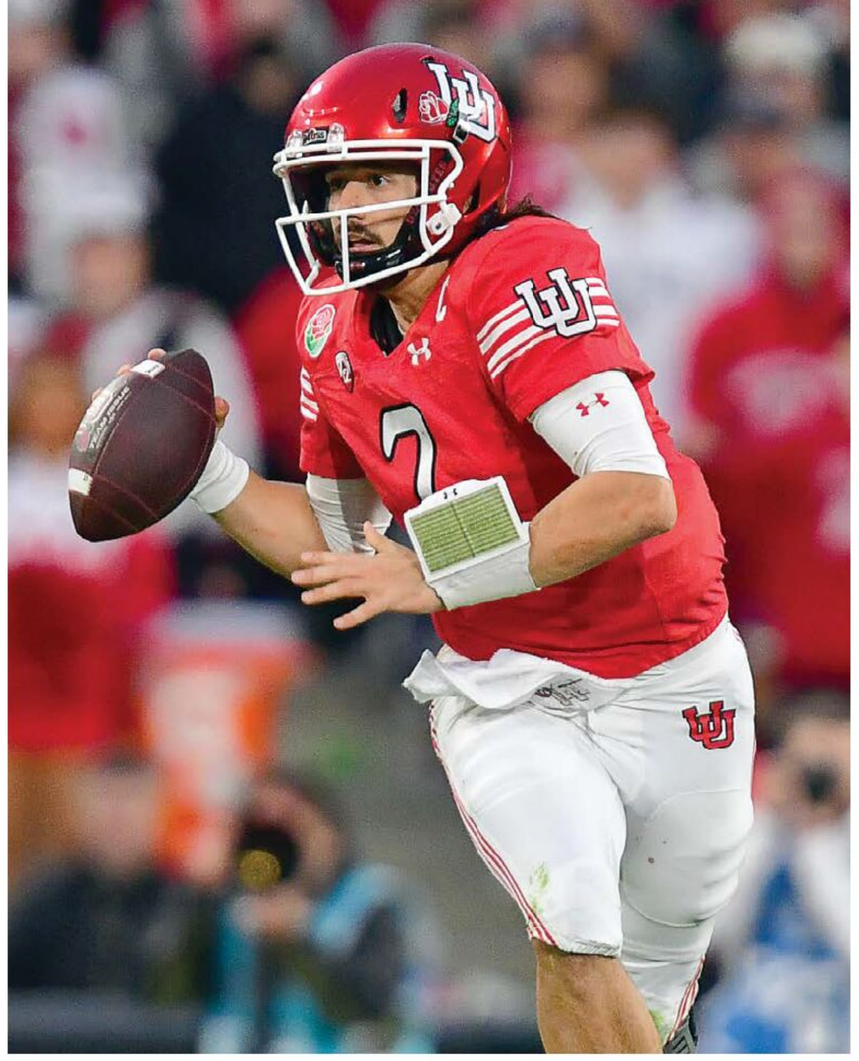
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Isaac Wilson, QB	★★★★
2.	Jeilani Davis, S	★★★★
3.	Isaiah Garcia, OL	★★★
4.	Quimari Shemwell, CB	★★★
5.	Hunter Andrews, RB	★★★
6.	Davis Andrews, S	★★★
7.	Sammie Hunter, CB	★★★
8.	Latristan Thompson, CB	★★★
9.	Maurice Evans, S	★★★
10.	David Washington, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kyle Whittingham • Record at School: 162-79 (19+ years) • Career Record: 162-79 (19+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Andy Ludwig • Defensive Coordinator: Morgan Scalley • Location: Salt Lake City, Utah
Stadium: Rice-Eccles Stadium (51,444)



Cameron Rising

SCOUTING THE UTES

"If you had to pick one program coming in from the Pac-12 as a legit contender, it's definitely these guys on Day 1. They're replacing a lot of guys in the WR group and secondary, but the system and culture there is so steady. They're coming from a conference where they built a brand by bullying finesse offenses and creating that crazy home environment. This team was way better than their record in '23 when you factor injuries, especially on offense. ... If [QB Cameron] Rising is back and healthy all season, they've got a legit shot at a first-year Big 12 title."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	3	Dorian Singer (Sr.)	0	Taeshaun Lyons (Fr.)
WR	10	**MONEY PARKS (SR.)**	4	Munir McClain (Sr.)
WR	5	Mycah Pittman (Sr.)	6	Daidren Zipperer (Fr.)
LT	55	**SPENCER FANO (SO.)**	71	Caleb Lomu (Fr.)
LG	68	Jaren Kump (Jr.)	62	Solatoa Moea'i (So.)
C	53	Johnny Maea (Sr.)	68	Jaren Kump (Jr.)
RG	52	**MICHAEL MOKOFISI (JR.)**	59	Falcon Kaumatule (Sr.)
RT	73	Tanoa Togiai (Jr.)	72	Isaiah Garcia (Fr.)
TE	80	**BRANT KUITHE (SR.)**	85	Carsen Ryan (Jr.)
QB	7	**CAMERON RISING (SR.)**	11	Isaac Wilson (Fr.)
RB	2	Micah Bernard (Sr.)	1	Jaylon Glover (Jr.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE	0	Logan Fano (So.)	7	**VAN FILLINGER (SR.)**
DT	58	**JUNIOR TAFUNA (SR.)**	77	Simote Pepa (Jr.)
DT	57	**KEANU TANUVASA (SO.)**	95	Aliki Vimahi (Sr.)
DE	81	Connor O'Toole (Sr.)		Paul Fitzgerald (So.)
LB	21	**KARENE REID (SR.)**	33	Kana'i Lopes (Fr.)
LB	14	Josh Calvert (Sr.)	33	Kana'i Lopes (Fr.)
LB	8	**LANDER BARTON (JR.)**	12	Sione Fotu (Jr.)
CB	1	**KENAN JOHNSON (SR.)**	4	Cameron Calhoun (Fr.)
CB	5	**ZEMAIAH VAUGHN (SR.)**	9	Elijah Davis (So.)
SS	31	Nate Ritchie (Jr.)	10	Johnathan Hall (So.)
FS	15	**TAO JOHNSON (SO.)**	11	Alaka'i Gilman (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	36	Cole Becker (Sr.)	KR	5	Mycah Pittman (Sr.)
P	34	Jack Bouwmeester (Sr.)	PR	10	Money Parks (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Gary A. Vasquez-USA TODAY Sports

Garrett Greene

SCOUTING THE MOUNTAINEERS

"Neal Brown is a fantastic program manager and never really showed any of the strain from the hot seat. It's hard to tell how much they've turned the corner; a lot of that depends on if they can help Garrett Greene elevate. He could be a top quarterback in the nation if there's support around him. ... Defensively they're returning a lot of guys who were decent last year, not spectacular. ... There are a lot of similarities to Neal's time at Troy; he's going to build and find that right culture, and then it takes off. They could be a surprise contender for the league title if everything goes right on offense. A lot of those freshmen last year could really break out this year."

— An opposing Big 12 assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	5	Jaden Bray (Jr.)	10	Jarell Williams (So.)
WR	84	**HUDSON CLEMENT (SO.)**	7	Traylon Ray (So.)
WR	29	Preston Fox (Jr.)	2	Rodney Gallagher III (So.)
LT	74	**WYATT MILUM (SR.)**	60	Johnny Williams IV (Fr.)
LG	55	**TOMAS RIMAC (JR.)**	56	Sullivan Weidman (So.)
C	50	**BRANDON YATES (SR.)**	67	Landen Livingston (So.)
RG	66	Ja'Quay Hubbard (Sr.)	52	Nick Krahe (Fr.)
RT	58	Nick Malone (Sr.)	78	Xavier Bausley (So.)
TE	87	**KOLE TAYLOR (SR.)**	81	Treylan Davis (Jr.)
QB	6	**GARRETT GREENE (SR.)**	8	Nicco Marchiol (So.)
RB	4	**CJ DONALDSON JR. (JR.)**	22	Jahiem White (So.)

DEFENSE (6)

DT	99	Hammond Russell IV (Jr.)	54	Fatorma Mulbah (Sr.)
DE	5	**SEAN MARTIN (SR.)**	11	T.J. Jackson (Sr.)
DE	96	**EDWARD VESTERINEN (SR.)**	52	Corey McIntyre Jr. (Fr.)
SPUR	8	Tyrin Bradley (Sr.)	47	Ty French (Sr.)
MLB	40	Josiah Trotter (Fr.)	35	Reid Carrico (Jr.)
MLB	4	**TREY LATHAN (SO.)**	15	**BEN CUTTER (SO.)**
CB	20	Ayden Garnes (Jr.)	6	Jacolby Spells (Jr.)
CB	1	Garnett Hollis Jr. (Sr.)	23	TJ Crandall (So.)
SPEAR	32	Raleigh Collins III (So.)	34	Avery Wilcox (Jr.)
S	2	**AUBREY BURKS (SR.)**	28	Aden Tagaloa-Nelson (Fr.)
S	12	**ANTHONY WILSON (SR.)**	3	Jaheem Joseph (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	22	Michael Hayes (Sr.)	KR	22	Jahiem White (So.)
P	41	Oliver Straw (Jr.)	PR	29	Preston Fox (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Bob Donnan-USA TODAY Sports

WEST VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 26 | BIG 12 PREDICTION: 6 | 2023 RECORD: 9-4, 6-3 BIG 12

OFFENSE West Virginia established an identity as a ground-and-pound offense in 2023. The Mountaineers led the Big 12 in rushing and ranked fourth nationally. True freshman Jahiem White ran for 842 yards and four touchdowns, while CJ Donaldson Jr. rushed for 798 yards and 11 scores.

In his first season as a starter, quarterback Garrett Greene threw for 2,406 yards and 16 touchdowns against just four interceptions. He also ran for 772 yards and 13 more scores.

WVU added Oklahoma State transfer Jaden Bray to a wide receiver room that far exceeded expectations in 2023. Former walk-on Hudson Clement earned a scholarship after the second game of the season. Also back are Traylon Ray, Rodney Gallagher III and Preston Fox. Kole Taylor returns for a second season at tight end.

WVU will have one of the most experienced offensive lines in the country, even after graduating multi-year starters Zach Frazier and Doug Nester.

DEFENSE The Mountaineers made big strides on defense last season, finishing in the top half of the league in both total yards and points allowed. Depth was a big issue, however, and so the WVU coaching staff hit the transfer portal hard this winter. Four new secondary players — Garnett Hollis Jr. and Jaheem Joseph (Northwestern), Ayden Garnes (Duquesne) and TJ Crandall (Colorado State) — bolster a group that returns safeties Aubrey Burks and Anthony Wilson.

Several injuries at linebacker forced players into action before they were ready last year. Josiah Trotter got hurt last spring, Trey Lathan went down in September and Ben Cutter started eight games as a true freshman. Reid Carrico (Ohio State) was brought in to add a veteran leader.

WVU led the Big 12 with 33 sacks but wanted more from its edge rushers, so FCS standout Ty French (Gardner-Webb) was brought into pair with Tyrin Bradley. Along the line, Sean Martin and Edward Vesterinen are returning starters, while Hammond Russell IV, Fatorma Mulbah, Corey McIntyre Jr. and Troy transfer T.J. Jackson will fill out the rotation.

SPECIALISTS All three of WVU's specialists are back for 2024. Kicker Michael Hayes was 17-of-21 on field goals. Punter Oliver Straw averaged 43 yards and downed 19 inside the 20. Austin Brinkman is considered one of the best long snappers in the country.

FINAL ANALYSIS Nine wins were a big step for head coach Neal Brown and WVU. The next step is to contend for a Big 12 championship. With an influx of transfers on defense and a ton of returning production on offense, the Mountaineers seem well positioned in the new 16-team Big 12.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Penn State
Sept. 7	Albany
Sept. 14	at Pittsburgh
Sept. 21	Kansas
Oct. 5	at Oklahoma St.
Oct. 12	Iowa State
Oct. 19	Kansas State
Oct. 26	at Arizona
Nov. 9	at Cincinnati
Nov. 16	Baylor
Nov. 23	UCF
Nov. 30	at Texas Tech

2023 RESULTS (9-4, 6-3 BIG 12)

Sept. 2	at Penn State	L	15-38
Sept. 9	Duquesne	W	56-17
Sept. 16	Pittsburgh	W	17-6
Sept. 23	Texas Tech	W	20-13
Sept. 30	at TCU	W	24-21
Oct. 12	at Houston	L	39-41
Oct. 21	Oklahoma State	L	34-48
Oct. 28	at UCF	W	41-28
Nov. 4	BYU	W	37-7
Nov. 11	at Oklahoma	L	20-59
Nov. 18	Cincinnati	W	42-21
Nov. 25	at Baylor	W	34-31
Dec. 27	vs. North Carolina#	W	30-10

#Duke's Mayo Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	DayDay Farmer, WR	★★★
2.	Obinna Onwuka, EDGE	★★★
3.	Rickey Williams, LB	★★★
4.	Jason Cross, S	★★★
5.	Kyle Altuner, OL	★★★
6.	Makai Byerson, EDGE	★★★
7.	Brandon Rehmann, WR	★★★
8.	Zae Jannings, S	★★★
9.	Traevon Dunbar, RB	★★★
10.	Keyshawn Robinson, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Neal Brown • Record at School: 31-29 (5 years) • Career Record: 66-45 (9 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Chad Scott • Defensive Coordinators: Jordan Lesley, ShaDon Brown • Location: Morgantown, W.Va. Stadium: Mountaineer Field at Milan Puskar Stadium (60,000)

B1G PREVIEW

TreVeyon Henderson, RB, Ohio State

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1	OHIO STATE	BUCKEYES
2	OREGON	DUCKS
3	MICHIGAN	WOLVERINES
4	PENN STATE	NITTANY LIONS
5	USC	TROJANS
6	IOWA	HAWKEYES
7	NEBRASKA	CORNHUSKERS
8	WISCONSIN	BbadgerS
9	RUTGERS	SCARLET KNIGHTS
10	WASHINGTON	HUSKIES
11	MARYLAND	TERRAPINS
12	MINNESOTA	GOLDEN GOPHERS
13	MICHIGAN STATE	SPARTANS
14	UCLA	BRUINS
15	ILLINOIS	FIGHTING ILLINI
16	NORTHWESTERN	WILDCATS
17	INDIANA	HOOSIERS
18	PURDUE	BOILERMAKERS

BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIP

OHIO STATE OVER OREGON

Adam Cairns/Columbus Dispatch

ALL BIG TEN-TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	**Dillon Gabriel**	Oregon
RB	**Quinshon Judkins**	Ohio State
RB	**TreVeyon Henderson**	Ohio State
AP	**Nicholas Singleton**	Penn State
WR	**Emeka Egbuka**	Ohio State
WR	**Tez Johnson**	Oregon
WR	**Evan Stewart**	Oregon
TE	**Colston Loveland**	Michigan
C	**Logan Jones**	Iowa
OL	**Donovan Jackson**	Ohio State
OL	**Ajani Cornelius**	Oregon
OL	**Aireontae Ersery**	Minnesota
OL	**Josh Conerly**	Oregon

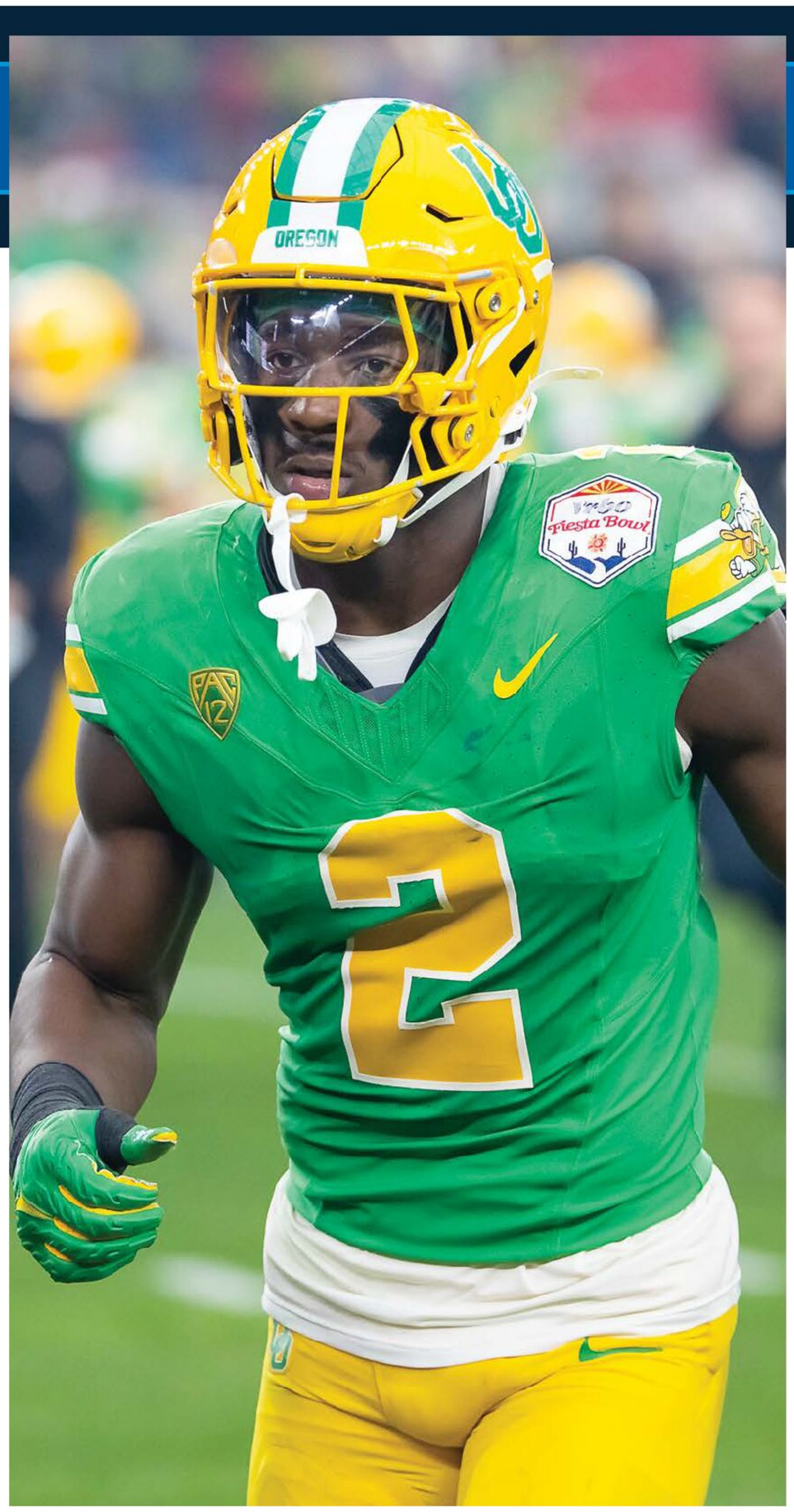
FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	**JT Tuimoloau**	Ohio State
DL	**Mason Graham**	Michigan
DL	**Tyleik Williams**	Ohio State
DL	**Jack Sawyer**	Ohio State
DL	**Abdul Carter**	Penn State
LB	**Jay Higgins**	Iowa
LB	**Nick Jackson**	Iowa
LB	**Jeffrey Bassa**	Oregon
CB	**Will Johnson**	Michigan
CB	**Denzel Burke**	Ohio State
S	**Dillon Thieneman**	Purdue
S	**Caleb Downs**	Ohio State

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	**Dragan Kesich**	Minnesota
P	**Ryan Eckley**	Michigan State
KR	**Zachariah Branch**	USC
PR	**Zachariah Branch**	USC

For second- and third-team selections, visit athlonsports.com



Jeffrey Bassa, LB, Oregon

Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Alamo: USC vs. Kansas State
Citrus: Iowa vs. Missouri
Duke's Mayo: Rutgers vs. Louisville
Guaranteed Rate: Minnesota vs. Texas Tech
Holiday: Washington vs. Virginia Tech
Music City: Wisconsin vs. Kentucky
Pinstripe: Maryland vs. NC State
Quick Lane: Michigan State vs. Northern Illinois
Reliaquest: Nebraska vs. Tennessee
CFP First Round: Oregon vs. Liberty
CFP First Round: Penn State vs. Ole Miss
CFP First Round: Michigan vs. Alabama
Fiesta Bowl (CFP Quarterfinals): Oregon vs. Utah
Rose Bowl (CFP Quarterfinals): Ohio State vs. Ole Miss
Orange Bowl (CFP Semifinals): Oregon vs. Georgia
Cotton Bowl (CFP Semifinals): Ohio State vs. Texas
National Championship: Ohio State vs. Georgia

B1G PREVIEW

Sherrone Moore, Michigan

Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State

COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

INDIANA
Head Coach: New: Curt Cignetti; Old: Tom Allen
Offense: New: Mike Shanahan, Tino Sunseri; Old: Anthony Tucker, Rod Carey
Defense: New: Bryant Haines Old: Matt Guerrier, Chad Wilt

IOWA
Offense: New: Tim Lester; Old: Brian Ferentz

MARYLAND
Defense: New: Brian Williams, Aazaar Abdul-Rahim; Old: Brian Williams

MICHIGAN
Head Coach: New: Sherrone Moore; Old: Jim Harbaugh
Offense: New: Kirk Campbell; Old: Sherrone Moore
Defense: New: Wink Martindale: Old: Jesse Minter, Steve Clinkscale

MICHIGAN STATE
Head Coach: New: Jonathan Smith: Old: Mel Tucker
Offense: New: Brian Lindgren; Old: Jay Johnson
Defense: New: Joe Rossi; Old: Scottie Hazelton

MINNESOTA
Defense: New: Nick Monroe, Corey Hetherman; Old: Joe Rossi, Nick Monroe

NEBRASKA
Offense: New: Glenn Thomas, Marcus Satterfield; Old: Marcus Satterfield

NORTHWESTERN
Offense: New: Zach Lujan; Old: Mike Bajakian
Defense: New: Tim McGarigle; Old: David Braun

OHIO STATE
Offense: New: Chip Kelly, Brian Hartline; Old: Brian Hartline

PENN STATE
Offense: New: Andy Kotelnicki; Old: Ja'Juan Seider, Ty Howle (interim)
Defense: New: Tom Allen, Anthony Poindexter; Old: Manny Diaz

UCLA
Head Coach: New: DeShaun Foster; Old: Chip Kelly
Offense: New: Eric Bieniemy; Old: Chip Kelly
Defense: New: Ikaika Malloe; Old: D'Anton Lynn

USC
Defense: New: D'Anton Lynn, Eric Henderson; Old: Alex Grinch

WASHINGTON
Head Coach: New: Jedd Fisch; Old: Kalen DeBoer
Offense: New: Brennan Carroll; Old: Ryan Grubb
Defense: New: Steve Belichick; Old: William Inge, Chuck Morrell

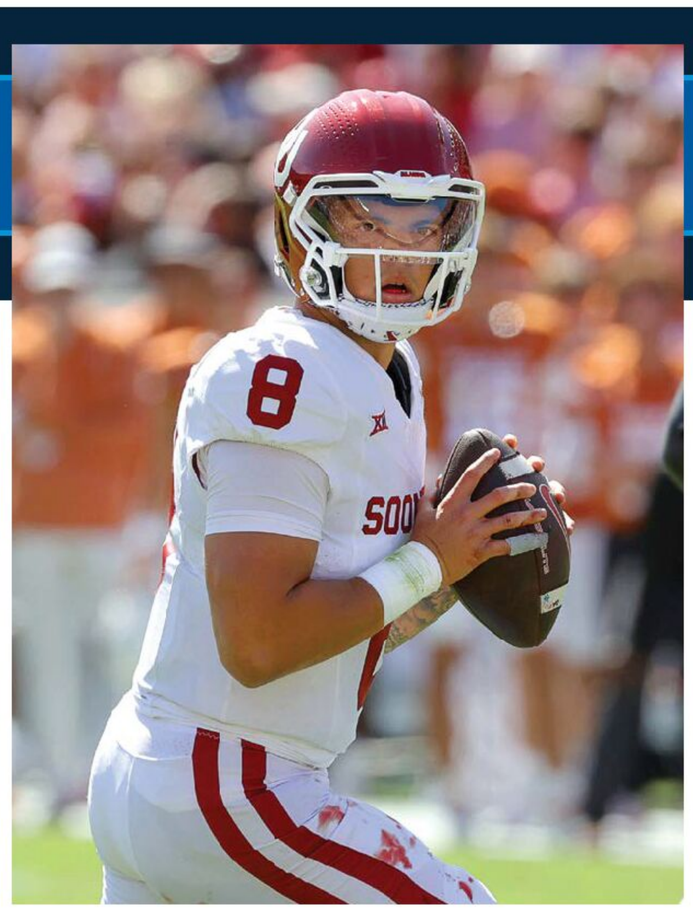
WISCONSIN
Defense: New: Mike Tressel, Alex Grinch; Old: Mike Tressel, Colin Hitschler

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Jeremiah Smith	WR	Ohio State	★★★★★+	1
2.	Julian Sayin	QB	Ohio State	★★★★★+	5
3.	Cooper Cousins	IOL	Penn State	★★★★★	27
4.	Kevin Heywood	OT	Wisconsin	★★★★	33
5.	Koi Perich	S	Minnesota	★★★★	35
6.	Gatlin Bair	WR	Oregon	★★★★	36
7.	Lugard Edokpayi	Edge	Michigan	★★★★	40
8.	Carter Nelson	TE	Nebraska	★★★★	41
9.	Aaron Scott Jr.	CB	Ohio State	★★★★	43
10.	Mylan Graham	WR	Ohio State	★★★★	47

+Consensus 5-star prospect

From top: David Rodriguez Munoz; Adam Cairns/Columbus Dispatch



Dillon Gabriel, QB, Oregon

Jay Higgins, LB, Iowa

BIG TEN RETURNING LEADERS

PASSING	ATT	COMP	PCT	YDS	TD	INT	AVG/G
Dillon Gabriel*, Oklahoma	384	266	69.3	3,660	30	6	305.0
Will Howard*, Kansas St.	357	219	61.3	2,643	24	10	220.3
Hudson Card, Purdue	365	215	58.9	2,387	15	8	217.0

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
TreVeyon Henderson, Ohio St.	156	926	5.9	11	75	92.6
Kyle Monangai, Rutgers	242	1,262	5.2	8	55	97.1
Quinshon Judkins*, Ole Miss	271	1,158	4.3	15	40	89.1

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Elijah Sarratt*, James Madison	82	1,191	14.5	7	48	91.6
Will Pauling, Wisconsin	74	837	11.3	6	53	64.4
Evan Stewart*, Texas A&M	38	514	13.5	4	44	64.3

DEFENSE

TACKLES
Jay Higgins, Iowa (171); Wayne Matthews III*, ODU (135)

SACKS
Three players tied with 7.5

INTERCEPTIONS
Dillon Thieneman, Purdue (6); three players tied with 4

**Gabriel transferred to Oregon in the offseason; *Howard transferred to Ohio State in the offseason; *Judkins transferred to Ohio State in the offseason; *Sarratt transferred to Indiana in the offseason; *Stewart transferred to Oregon in the offseason; *Matthews transferred to Michigan State in the offseason*

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Ohio State (3)
2. Oregon (4)
3. Michigan (15)
4. Penn State (16)
5. USC (18)
6. Wisconsin (22)
7. Nebraska (24)
8. Iowa (30)
9. Purdue (31)
10. Minnesota (34)
11. Rutgers (41)
12. Michigan State (43)
13. Maryland (44)
14. Illinois (46)
15. Washington (54)
16. Indiana (63)
17. UCLA (70)
18. Northwestern (76)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

SEPT. 7
Texas at Michigan

SEPT. 21
USC at Michigan

OCT. 2
Ohio State at Oregon

OCT. 5
Michigan at Washington

OCT. 12
Penn State at USC

OCT. 26
Penn State at Wisconsin

NOV. 2
Oregon at Michigan

NOV. 2
Ohio State at Penn State

NOV. 23
USC at UCLA

NOV. 29
Nebraska at Iowa

NOV. 30
Michigan at Ohio State

NOV. 30
Washington at Oregon

From top: Bryan Terry/The Oklahoman; Jeffrey Becker-USA TODAY Sports

ILLINOIS FIGHTING ILLINI

NATIONAL FORECAST: 60 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 15 | 2023 RECORD: 5-7, 3-6 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Much hinges on the play of quarterback Luke Altmyer, who had his ups and downs last season as a sophomore. In nine starts, he threw for 1,883 yards and 13 touchdowns while also rushing for 282 yards. Altmyer has to adjust to the losses of wide receiver Isaiah Williams and tight end Tip Reiman, who are off to the NFL.

Also of concern is the departure of Isaiah Adams on the offensive line, as well as the decommitment of versatile recruit Andrew Dennis. The right side looks set, though, with guard Zy Crisler and tackle Josh Gesky, along with center Josh Kreutz. All three are returning starters.

Losing starting running back Reggie Love III to Purdue via the portal hurts, but the Illini have two capable replacements, as Kaden Feagin and Josh McCray both earned playing time a year ago. Feagin has the edge after averaging 4.6 yards per carry in his first season, while McCray just needs to stay healthy after dealing with injuries.

DEFENSE Defensive coordinator Aaron Henry has much to prove in his second season. His side of the ball is arguably the team's biggest question mark.

The Illini have to find a way to replace Jer'Zhan Newton and Keith Randolph on the defensive line. He might not enter the season as the starter, but transfer Enyce Sledge is a name to watch. He arrived at Auburn as one of the nation's top recruits, so coaches hope that Illinois is a better fit. Linebacker Daniel Brown, out of Hutchinson (Kan.) CC, is another solid pickup.

Tyler Strain is a leader in the secondary, but the Illini have plenty of players who could contribute. One is Demetrius Hill, whose season ended early last year because of a torn ACL.

SPECIALISTS The Illini seem set at kicker with David Olano, who spent most of last season handling kickoff duties. This year, he takes on an elevated role. Punter Hugh Robertson was honorable mention All-Big Ten last year as a freshman, when he averaged 42.7 yards per punt.

FINAL ANALYSIS The key for the Illini is getting steady play at running back. If the combination of Feagin and McCray can get going, it will make things so much easier for Altmyer. The defense is going to struggle for a bit, which makes offensive production that much more important.

The Illini have an early measuring stick. After opening against FCS Eastern Illinois, they play host to Kansas. That game should give fans a clearer idea of what to expect.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Eastern Illinois
Sept. 7	Kansas
Sept. 14	Central Michigan
Sept. 21	at Nebraska
Sept. 28	at Penn State
Oct. 12	Purdue
Oct. 19	Michigan
Oct. 26	at Oregon
Nov. 2	Minnesota
Nov. 16	Michigan State
Nov. 23	at Rutgers
Nov. 30	at Northwestern

2023 RESULTS (5-7, 3-6 BIG TEN)

Sept. 2	Toledo	W	30-28
Sept. 8	at Kansas	L	23-34
Sept. 16	Penn State	L	13-30
Sept. 23	Florida Atlantic	W	23-17
Sept. 30	at Purdue	L	19-44
Oct. 6	Nebraska	L	7-20
Oct. 14	at Maryland	W	27-24
Oct. 21	Wisconsin	L	21-25
Nov. 4	at Minnesota	W	27-26
Nov. 11	Indiana (ot)	W	48-45
Nov. 18	at Iowa	L	13-15
Nov. 25	Northwestern	L	43-45

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ca'lil Valentine, RB	★★★
2.	Carlos Orr, WR	★★★
3.	Tysean Griffin, ATH	★★★
4.	Trey Petty, QB	★★★
5.	Demetrius John, DL	★★★
6.	Daniel Brown, EDGE	★★★
7.	Eddie Tuerk, DL	★★★
8.	Vernon Woodward, CB	★★★
9.	Chase Canada	★★★
10.	Angelo McCullom, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bret Bielema • Record at School: 18-19 (3 years) • Career Record: 115-77 (15 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Barry Lunney Jr. • Defensive Coordinator: Aaron Henry • Location: Champaign-Urbana, Ill.
Stadium: University of Illinois Memorial Stadium (60,670)

Seth Coleman

SCOUTING THE FIGHTING ILLINI

"Bret [Bielema] might not be on the hot seat, but this is definitely a prove-it season for him. It feels like they lost their good momentum with their staff and their roster about two seasons back. ... Bret built the program back up by finding and developing a lot of local and regional guys instead of swinging and missing in places like Texas and Florida. They've lost some key in-state battles recently that hurt them. ... The [Donovan] Leary kid could push [Luke] Altmyer; that could be a really interesting quarterback battle to watch. ... This isn't a bad roster at all, but if they have another losing season, the momentum will be gone."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	8	Malik Elzy (So.)	18	Michael Bartolotta (Jr.)
WR	13	**PAT BRYANT (SR.)**	2	Ashton Hollins (So.)
WR	1	Mario Sanders II (So.)	80	Hank Beatty (Jr.)
LT	74	J.C. Davis (Sr.)	58	Melvin Priestly (Jr.)
LG	78	Kevin Wigenton II (Jr.)	71	Hunter Whitenack (Jr.)
C	64	**JOSH KREUTZ (JR.)**	55	TJ McMillen (Fr.)
RG	72	**ZY CRISLER (SR.)**	75	Brandon Henderson (So.)
RT	73	**JOSH GESKY (JR.)**	56	Magnus Møller (So.)
TE	14	Cole Rusk (Jr.)	85	Tanner Arkin (Jr.)
QB	9	**LUKE ALTMYER (JR.)**	10	Donovan Leary (So.)
RB	3	Kaden Feagin (So.)	6	Josh McCray (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	11	Alex Bray (So.)	54	Demetrius John (Fr.)
DT	23	TeRah Edwards (Sr.)	27	Enyce Sledge (So.)
DE	6	Dennis Briggs Jr. (Sr.)	55	Jeremiah Warren (Fr.)
LB	17	**GABE JACAS (JR.)**	3	Alec Bryant (Jr.)
LB	28	**DYLAN ROSIEK (JR.)**	34	Ryan Meed (Sr.)
LB	39	Kenenna Odeluga (Jr.)	41	James Kreutz (So.)
LB	9	**SETH COLEMAN (SR.)**	4	Daniel Brown (Jr.)
CB	25	Jaheim Clarke (So.)	2	Saboor Karriem (So.)
CB	20	Tyler Strain (Jr.)	0	Chase Canada (So.)
SS	7	Matthew Bailey (So.)	1	Demetrius Hill (Jr.)
FS	10	**MILES SCOTT (JR.)**	26	Mac Resetich (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	20	David Olano (So.)	KR	7	Kenari Wilcher (So.)
P	19	Hugh Robertson (Jr.)	PR	80	Hank Beatty (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Tommy Gilligan-USA TODAY Sports

Donaven McCulley

SCOUTING THE HOOSIERS

"There's a lot of talk about the program for the first time since any of us can remember. Cig [Curt Cignetti] is a really good hire; it shows that the school wants to be competitive and respectable in football. They're taking football seriously in NIL, too. ... They brought in a few studs from James Madison, and they've worked the portal well. The competition level in this league is still above them, but they should look more talented, especially on offense. The MAC quarterback [Kurtis Rourke] is pretty solid. ... If you're setting reasonable Year 1 expectations, I'd look for them to build an offensive identity to help recruiting."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	4	Myles Price (Sr.)	5	Ke'Shawn Williams (Sr.)
WR	8	Elijah Sarratt (Jr.)	12	Miles Cross (Sr.)
WR	1	**DONAVEN MCCULLEY (SR.)**	7	E.J. Williams Jr. (Sr.)
LT	65	**CARTER SMITH (SO.)**	78	Cooper Jones (Jr.)
LG	77	Tyler Stephens (Sr.)	66	Noah Bolticoff (So.)
C	56	**MIKE KATIC (SR.)**	74	Bray Lynch (So.)
RG	55	Nick Kidwell (So.)	53	Vincent Fiacable (Jr.)
RT	75	Trey Wedig (Sr.)	73	Austin Barrett (Fr.)
TE	44	Zach Horton (Sr.)	45	**TREY WALKER (SR.)**
QB	9	Kurtis Rourke (Sr.)	2	Tayven Jackson (So.)
RB	6	Justice Ellison (Sr.)	22	Kaelon Black (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	6	Mikail Kamara (Jr.)	41	**LANELL CARR JR. (SR.)**
DE	7	**JACOB MANGUM-FARRAR (SR.)**	55	Venson Sneed Jr. (So.)
DT	92	**MARCUS BURRIS JR. (JR.)**	93	Robby Harrison (So.)
DT	99	James Carpenter (Sr.)	90	J'mari Monette (So.)
OLB	2	Jailin Walker (Sr.)	26	Joshua Rudolph (Sr.)
ILB	10	Aiden Fisher (Jr.)	14	Kaiden Turner (So.)
ROV	12	Terry Jones Jr. (Sr.)	19	Josh Sanguinetti (Sr.)
CB	22	**JAMARI SHARPE (SO.)**	3	JoJo Johnson (Jr.)
CB	9	Jamier Johnson (Jr.)		Cedarius Doss (Sr.)
SS	15	**NIC TOOMER (SR.)**	19	Josh Sanguinetti (Sr.)
FS	1	Shawn Asbury II (Sr.)	25	Amare Ferrell (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	39	Nicolas Radicic (Fr.)	KR	5 Ke'Shawn Williams (Sr.)
P	94	James Evans (Sr.)	PR	4 Myles Price (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Rich Janzaruk/Herald-Times

INDIANA HOOSIERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 71 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 17 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 1-8 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Former James Madison head coach Curt Cignetti's offensive background was a key factor in the hiring process. The reputation he built as a quarterback whisperer didn't hurt, either.

The Hoosiers offense was in a constant state of upheaval from 2021-23 with seven different quarterbacks making at least one start and three different offensive coordinators. Cignetti brought over nearly his entire offensive staff from JMU and focused much of his first two months on the job building out IU's offensive personnel. He got early wins by convincing receiver Donaven McCulley and left tackle Carter Smith to withdraw from the portal. McCulley led IU in all major receiving categories last season, while Smith started all 12 games as a redshirt freshman.

The key offseason move for Cignetti was landing his top quarterback target in former MAC Offensive Player of the Year Kurtis Rourke, who had a lengthy body of work as a three-year starter. The Ohio transfer has a strong arm and the mobility to thrive in a read-option offense.

Cignetti also signed eight skill players out of the portal.

DEFENSE Much of the continuity on defense will come from James Madison standouts transferring in. The Hoosiers are looking for defensive end Mikail Kamara, defensive tackle James Carpenter and linebackers Aiden Fisher and Jailin Walker to step into the same roles they had for the Dukes.

Cignetti has confidence that this talented group — each of them earned All Sun-Belt honors last year — will be just as impactful in the Big Ten.

The secondary is where many of IU's returning defenders remain in the mix. Jamari Sharpe played 500-plus snaps at corner last year and came out of spring penciled in with the first team. Former Stanford transfer Nic Toomer could land a starting role as well after switching over to safety.

SPECIALISTS Many of the offensive skill players Indiana's new staff added from the portal have special teams experience. Wake Forest receiver Ke'Shawn Williams and Texas Tech receiver Myles Price are prime examples. One spot that's not up for grabs is punter, where New Zealand transplant James Evans remains. The former rugby standout was third in the Big Ten last year with 45.8 yards per punt.

FINAL ANALYSIS Cignetti has never had a losing record in 13 seasons as a head coach. He has made it clear that he isn't planning for that streak to end. To reach bowl eligibility, Indiana will need Rourke to click like Cignetti's past quarterbacks, and the Hoosiers must stay healthy at key spots (offensive and defensive line) where they don't have much depth.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	FIU
Sept. 7	Western Illinois
Sept. 14	at UCLA
Sept. 21	Charlotte
Sept. 28	Maryland
Oct. 5	at Northwestern
Oct. 19	Nebraska
Oct. 26	Washington
Nov. 2	at Michigan St.
Nov. 9	Michigan
Nov. 23	at Ohio State
Nov. 30	Purdue

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 1-8 BIG TEN)

Sept. 2	Ohio State	L	3-23
Sept. 8	Indiana State	W	41-7
Sept. 16	vs. Louisville #	L	14-21
Sept. 23	Akron (ot)	W	29-27
Sept. 30	at Maryland	L	17-44
Oct. 14	at Michigan	L	7-52
Oct. 21	Rutgers	L	14-31
Oct. 28	at Penn State	L	24-33
Nov. 4	Wisconsin	W	20-14
Nov. 11	at Illinois (ot)	L	45-48
Nov. 18	Michigan State	L	21-24
Nov. 25	at Purdue	L	31-35

#Indianapolis

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Tyler Cherry, QB	★★★★
2.	Evan Lawrence, OT	★★★
3.	Josh Philostin, CB	★★★
4.	Quentin Clark, LB	★★★
5.	Charlie Becker, WR	★★★
6.	Adedamola Ajani, OL	★★★
7.	Brody Kosin, TE	★★★
8.	William DePaepe, EDGE	★★★
9.	Alberto Mendoza, QB	★★★
10.	Christian Peterson, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Curt Cignetti • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 119-35 (13 years)
Offensive Coordinators: Mike Shanahan, Tino Sunseri • Defensive Coordinator: Bryant Haines
Location: Bloomington, Ind. • Stadium: Memorial Stadium (52,626)

IOWA HAWKEYES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 28 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 6 | 2023 RECORD: 10-4, 7-2 BIG TEN

OFFENSE After two seasons in which the Iowa offense ranked near the bottom nationally in multiple statistical categories, athletic director Beth Goetz fired offensive coordinator Brian Ferentz with four games left in the 2023 regular season. Kirk Ferentz, the longest-tenured head coach in the country, isn't used to having football decisions made for him. The 26th-year head coach plowed ahead, though, hiring former Western Michigan head coach Tim Lester as his new offensive coordinator and promising that the offense would look different in 2024.

Quarterback Cade McNamara suffered a season-ending knee injury in the fifth game, and backup Deacon Hill completed only 48.6 percent of his passes and has transferred. McNamara was limited during the spring, but he is expected to be healthy by the start of preseason practice.

Iowa has some nice individual pieces on offense, including senior tight end Luke Lachey, but there is little depth at receiver, and while the offensive line is experienced, it has underperformed. Iowa has solid depth at running back, but the backfield is only as good as the players up front.

DEFENSE Iowa won 10 games last season mostly because of this side of the ball. Phil Parker is arguably the best defensive coordinator in the nation, and his 2024 unit should only enhance that reputation.

Iowa didn't do much in the transfer portal, but that was mostly because the key players on defense chose to return, including linebackers Jay Higgins and Nick Jackson. Higgins led the Big Ten in tackles last season, while Jackson started every game after transferring from Virginia.

Two starters from last season on the defensive line have to be replaced, but there is quality depth at all four positions.

The secondary should be solid, even without All-Big Ten cornerback Cooper DeJean. Safeties Quinn Schulte, Xavier Nwankpa and Sebastian Castro and cornerback Jermari Harris all have started multiple games.

SPECIALISTS Tory Taylor, the 2023 Ray Guy Award winner and Melbourne, Australia, native, was taken in the fourth round of the NFL Draft, but there is more help coming from down under in the form of freshman punter Rhys Dakin. Junior kicker Drew Stevens returns after an up-and-down 2023 season in which he made 18-of-26 field-goal attempts.

FINAL ANALYSIS The defense should be rock-solid again, but it can't make Iowa a contender by itself. The offense will have to do its part, or it could be another season in which the Hawkeyes fall short of Big Ten contention. The schedule looks tougher than last season, so unless the offense improves considerably, Iowa could find itself in a mid-tier bowl game.

2023 RESULTS (10-4, 7-2 BIG TEN)

Sept. 2	Utah State	W	24-14
Sept. 9	at Iowa State	W	20-13
Sept. 16	Western Michigan	W	41-10
Sept. 23	at Penn State	L	0-31
Sept. 30	Michigan State	W	26-16
Oct. 7	Purdue	W	20-14
Oct. 14	at Wisconsin	W	15-6
Oct. 21	Minnesota	L	10-12
Nov. 4	vs. Northwestern# (ot)	W	10-7
Nov. 11	Rutgers	W	22-0
Nov. 18	Illinois	W	15-13
Nov. 24	at Nebraska	W	13-10
Dec. 2	vs. Michigan %	L	0-27
Jan. 1	vs. Tennessee &	L	0-35

#Chicago %Indianapolis &Citrus Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Illinois State
Sept. 7	Iowa State
Sept. 14	Troy
Sept. 21	at Minnesota
Oct. 5	at Ohio State
Oct. 12	Washington
Oct. 19	at Michigan St.
Oct. 26	Northwestern
Nov. 2	Wisconsin
Nov. 9	at UCLA
Nov. 23	at Maryland
Nov. 29	Nebraska

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Will Nolan, OT	★★★★
2.	Gavin Hoffman, TE	★★★★
3.	Joseph Anderson, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Chima Chineke, EDGE	★★★★
5.	Cam Buffington, LB	★★★★
6.	Derek Weisskopf, LB	★★★★
7.	Drew Campbell, EDGE	★★★★
8.	Bodey McCaslin, OT	★★★
9.	Brevin Doll, RB	★★★
10.	Josh Janowski, OL	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kirk Ferentz • Record at School: 196-119 (25 years) Career Record: 208-140 (28 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tim Lester • Defensive Coordinator: Phil Parker • Location: Iowa City, Iowa • Stadium: Kinnick Stadium (69,250)

Jay Higgins

SCOUTING THE HAWKEYES

"Everything here is automatic except the offense. They're a premier development and depth program at how they scout, build and develop on defense and special teams. It's just the offensive component. ... How much is [new offensive coordinator] Tim Lester really going to affect this program? How much can [QB Cade] McNamara do coming off the injury? Are they going to come out in 11 personnel on first down? [Lester] was a three-receiver, four-receiver look guy at Western Michigan. ... This is one of the best tight end programs in the history of the game. ... I don't think anyone really knows what it's going to look like, but the idea that [head coach Kirk] Ferentz's son was the sole problem on offense? No way."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (9)

WR	3	Kaleb Brown (Jr.)	21	Kaden Wetjen (Sr.)
WR	6	**SETH ANDERSON (JR.)**	84	Jarriet Buie (Fr.)
LT	78	**MASON RICHMAN (SR.)**	71	Jack Dotzler (So.)
LG	70	Beau Stephens (Jr.)	58	Kade Pieper (Fr.)
C	65	**LOGAN JONES (SR.)**	76	Tylers Elsbury (Sr.)
RG	77	**CONNOR COLBY (SR.)**	59	Trevor Lauck (Fr.)
RT	67	**GENNINGS DUNKER (JR.)**	56	**NICK DEJONG (SR.)**
TE	85	**LUKE LACHEY (SR.)**	87	Addison Ostrenga (Jr.)
QB	12	**CADE MCNAMARA (SR.)**	11	Marco Lainez (Fr.)
RB	4	**LESHON WILLIAMS (SR.)**	2	Kaleb Johnson (Jr.)
FB	41	Rusty VanWetzinga (Fr.)	88	Hayden Large (Sr.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE	45	**DEONTAE CRAIG (SR.)**	48	Max Llewellyn (Jr.)
LT	95	Aaron Graves (Jr.)	51	Luke Gaffney (So.)
RT	94	**YAHYA BLACK (SR.)**	55	Jeremiah Pittman (Jr.)
DE	49	Ethan Hurkett (Sr.)	90	Brian Allen (So.)
LEO	29	**SEBASTIAN CASTRO (SR.)**	37	Kyler Fisher (Sr.)
MLB	34	**JAY HIGGINS (SR.)**	41	Jaden Harrell (Jr.)
WLB	10	**NICK JACKSON (SR.)**	43	Karson Sharar (Jr.)
CB	8	Deshaun Lee (So.)	2	TJ Hall (Jr.)
CB	27	**JERMARI HARRIS (SR.)**	7	John Nestor (So.)
SS	1	**XAVIER NWANKPA (JR.)**	26	Kael Kolarik (So.)
FS	30	**QUINN SCHULTE (SR.)**	4	Keon Entringer (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	18	Drew Stevens (Jr.)	KR	21	Kaden Wetjen (Sr.)
P	9	Rhys Dakin (Fr.)	PR	21	Kaden Wetjen (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Jeffrey Becker-USA TODAY Sports

Roman Hemby

SCOUTING THE TERRAPINS

"The biggest need is finding a replacement for Taulia [Tagovailoa], and it doesn't look like they had one guy really step up and do that in the spring. Maybe they're active in the portal; we'll see... They have a lot of talented individual pieces on both sides of the ball because Mike [Locksley] is an elite recruiter, but the knock on the program is that they're missing something to make the whole greater than the sum of the parts. ... I wouldn't bet against that staff and their experience when it comes to personnel, though. I don't think Maryland is going to top the nation in NIL, but that entire staff knows how to recruit, even if they're losing a third of the roster every year."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	10	**TAJ FELTON (SR.)**	5	Octavian Smith Jr. (Jr.)
WR	1	**KADEN PRATHER (SR.)**	4	Shaleak Knotts (Jr.)
WR	19	Braeden Wisloski (So.)	26	Ricardo Cooper Jr. (Fr.)
LT	74	Alan Herron (Jr.)	55	Andre Roye Jr. (So.)
LG	76	**KYLE LONG (SO.)**	54	Deandre Duffus (Fr.)
C	70	Josh Kaltenberger (Sr.)	56	Tamarus Walker (Fr.)
RG	66	Aliou Bah (So.)	58	Marcus Dumervil (Sr.)
RT	75	Conor Fagan (Sr.)	77	Kevin Kalonji (Jr.)
TE	85	**PRESTON HOWARD (SO.)**	0	Dylan Wade (So.)
QB	12	Cameron Edge (So.)	9	Billy Edwards Jr. (Jr.)
RB	24	**ROMAN HEMBY (JR.)**	23	Colby McDonald (Sr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	5	**QUASHON FULLER (SR.)**	39	Daniel Owens (So.)
NT	8	**JORDAN PHILLIPS (SO.)**	57	Isaac Bunyun (Sr.)
DT	97	**TOMMY AKINGBESOTE (SR.)**	40	Taizse Johnson (Sr.)
JACK	19	Donell Brown (Sr.)	42	DJ Samuels (So.)
SLB	45	**KELLAN WYATT (JR.)**	31	Michael Harris (So.)
MLB	11	**RUBEN HYPPOLITE II (SR.)**	44	Caleb Wheatland (Jr.)
WLB	9	Fa'Najae Gotay (Sr.)	16	Daniel Wingate (So.)
CB	22	Jalen Huskey (Jr.)	24	Chantz Harley (Jr.)
CB	17	Lionell Whitaker (Jr.)	25	Kevis Thomas (So.)
SS	41	Rex Fleming (Sr.)	18	Alex Moore (Fr.)
FS	12	**DANTE TRADER JR. (SR.)**	34	Lavain Scruggs (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	91	Jack Howes (Jr.)	KR	19 Braeden Wisloski (So.)
P	43	Brenden Segovia (Jr.)	PR	10 Tai Felton (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Reggie Hildred-USA TODAY Sports

MARYLAND TERRAPINS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 49 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 11 | 2023 RECORD: 8-5, 4-5 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Who will be the quarterback with tenured Terrapin Taulia Tagovailoa gone? Who will block for said QB and open lanes for what head coach Mike Locksley promises will be a more muscular running game?

Here's the good news: Capable transfers — guard Aliou Bah (Georgia), center Josh Kaltenberger (Purdue) and tackle Alan Herron (D-II Shorter) — will fill holes up front. Veteran Kyle Long and knock-you-downers Conor Fagan, Kevin Kalonji and Marcus Dumervil can play as well.

They'll power a run game trying to improve on 3.7 yards per rush. Tailback Roman Hemby had 1,287 scrimmage yards in 2022, but his numbers dropped during the record-breaking 2023 Taulia Show. Hemby and tough-yardage stud Colby McDonald will get more chances now.

The wide receiver room is jam-packed. Along with speedsters Taj Felton and NFL prospect Kaden Prather, Octavian Smith Jr. and Shaleak Knotts are ready for star turns. Breakout tight ends Preston Howard and Dylan Wade have big-time blockers behind them.

Back to that QB conundrum: Billy Edwards Jr. made sweet music in a Music City Bowl MVP performance; experienced NC State transfer MJ Morris came aboard; Cameron Edge is the most skilled passer; and Champ Long has combo skills. Locksley hasn't ruled anyone out, including uber-athletic sophomore Jayden Sauray.

DEFENSE The strength of the defense is a veteran front seven where six seniors and five returning starters abide. End Quashon Fuller and tackle Tommy Akingbesote won't see much that surprises them, and linebackers Ruben Hyppolite II and Fa'Najae Gotay are stalwarts as well. Jack end Kellan Wyatt moves to linebacker, and a year in the Terp system allows Donnell Brown to cut loose at hybrid end.

Three defensive backfield starters are gone, but Lionell Whitaker played 11 games, and All-MAC performer Jalen Huskey (Bowling Green) is the other corner. Safety Dante Trader Jr. consistently makes plays.

SPECIALISTS Jack Howes nailed 13-of-19 field-goal attempts and 46-of-47 PATs. Brenden Segovia averaged 38.3 yards on eight punts, and he'll step into the job full time. Honorable mention all-conference returner Braeden Wisloski averaged 23.7 yards on 16 kickoff returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Locksley has all his coordinators and all but two position coaches back. His program has now won 23 games and three bowls over the last three seasons. There's continuity, and the Terps are accustomed to success, though there's room for more. Locksley sees toughness in the trenches as the next step. Oh yeah, and replacing all-timer Tagovailoa.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Connecticut
Sept. 7	Michigan State
Sept. 14	at Virginia
Sept. 21	Villanova
Sept. 28	at Indiana
Oct. 12	Northwestern
Oct. 19	USC
Oct. 26	at Minnesota
Nov. 9	at Oregon
Nov. 16	Rutgers
Nov. 23	Iowa
Nov. 30	at Penn State

2023 RESULTS (8-5, 4-5 BIG TEN)

Sept. 2	Towson	W	38-6
Sept. 9	Charlotte	W	38-20
Sept. 15	Virginia	W	42-14
Sept. 23	at Michigan State	W	31-9
Sept. 30	Indiana	W	44-17
Oct. 7	at Ohio State	L	17-37
Oct. 14	Illinois	L	24-27
Oct. 28	at Northwestern	L	27-33
Nov. 4	Penn State	L	15-51
Nov. 11	at Nebraska	W	13-10
Nov. 18	Michigan	L	24-31
Nov. 25	at Rutgers	W	42-24
Dec. 30	vs. Auburn #	W	31-13

#Music City Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Brandon Jacob, S	★★★
2.	Trevor Szymanski, OL	★★★
3.	Kevyn Humes, CB	★★★
4.	Brayden Lee, CB	★★★
5.	Dejuan Williams, RB	★★★
6.	Mekhai White, WR	★★★
7.	Keyshawn Flowers, LB	★★★
8.	Davon Watkins, OL	★★★
9.	Ryan Howerton, OT	★★★
10.	Anthony Reddick, EDGE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Locksley • Record at School: 29-33 (6+ years) • Career Record: 31-59 (8+ years)
Offensive Coordinators: Josh Gattis, Kevin Sumlin • Defensive Coordinator: Brian Williams
Location: College Park, Md. • Stadium: SECU Stadium (51,802)

MICHIGAN WOLVERINES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 7 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 3 | 2023 RECORD: 15-0, 9-0 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Michigan looks to replace its starting quarterback (J.J. McCarthy), running back (Blake Corum), entire offensive line and two most productive receivers from a season ago, all of them lost to the NFL.

A five-man QB battle in the spring is expected to come to a head in fall camp, while big-play back Donovan Edwards will take the reins on the ground. Up front, transfer tackle Myles Hinton (Stanford) and guard Josh Priebe (Northwestern) will help anchor a less experienced, less polished offensive line. Returning tight end Colston Loveland, an All-Big Ten selection last season, could vie for All-America honors.

The Wolverines' offense is currently designed to stick with its ground-and-pound formula, looking to eat away at time of possession and wear down opposing defenses. But lacking a proven quarterback and every-down back could mean a step back in efficiency.

DEFENSE The nation's No. 1-ranked unit has a new coordinator — longtime NFL assistant Don "Wink" Martindale, the architect of the disguise-heavy defense introduced at Michigan in 2021. Martindale will look to carry that over while mixing in some additional blitzing and pressure.

Up front, Michigan returns two of the Big Ten's best defensive tackles in Mason Graham and Kenneth Grant. Edge rushers Derrick Moore and Josaiah Stewart shared snaps with the starters last year. The Wolverines lack the depth they had on the edge a season ago, but they make up for it with an expanded inside linebacker group led by a pair of transfers, Ernest Hausmann (Nebraska) and Jaishawn Barham (Maryland).

On the back end, All-America corner Will Johnson is back for his junior year, anchoring a group that saw starting safety Rod Moore sidelined during the spring due to injury. With Moore expected to be out for much of the fall, a group of underclassmen will be counted on to play alongside safety Makari Paige and fill the void at slot corner.

SPECIALISTS Michigan addressed a major question mark, landing Arkansas State kicker Dominic Zvada during the spring transfer portal window. Tommy Doman, who averaged 44.3 yards per punt, is back, and Michigan hopes to find big-play production from Semaj Morgan on returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS While Michigan maintains much of what made its defensive unit so elite, first-year head coach Sherrone Moore must settle on a quarterback, hand the offense to a new coordinator (Kirk Campbell) and help bring along a new offensive line, all with fewer options at running back and receiver. The Wolverines' three-year run as Big Ten champions could be in serious jeopardy.

2023 RESULTS (15-0, 9-0 BIG TEN)

Sept. 2	East Carolina	W	30-3
Sept. 9	UNLV	W	35-7
Sept. 16	Bowling Green	W	31-6
Sept. 23	Rutgers	W	31-7
Sept. 30	at Nebraska	W	45-7
Oct. 7	at Minnesota	W	52-10
Oct. 14	Indiana	W	52-7
Oct. 21	at Michigan State	W	49-0
Nov. 4	Purdue	W	41-13
Nov. 11	at Penn State	W	24-15
Nov. 18	at Maryland	W	31-24
Nov. 25	Ohio State	W	30-24
Dec. 2	vs. Iowa #	W	27-0
Jan. 1	vs. Alabama % (ot)	W	27-20
Jan. 8	vs. Washington &	W	34-13

#Indianapolis %Rose Bowl: CFB Playoff Semifinal &Houston: CFB Playoff National Championship

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Fresno State
Sept. 7	Texas
Sept. 14	Arkansas State
Sept. 21	USC
Sept. 28	Minnesota
Oct. 5	at Washington
Oct. 19	at Illinois
Oct. 26	Michigan State
Nov. 2	Oregon
Nov. 9	at Indiana
Nov. 23	Northwestern
Nov. 30	at Ohio State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Lugard Edokpayi, EDGE ★★★★
2. Jo'Ziah Edmond, CB ★★★★
3. Cole Sullivan, LB ★★★★
4. Jordan Marshall, RB ★★★★
5. Andrew Sprague, OT ★★★★
6. Brady Prieskorn, TE ★★★★
7. Blake Frazier, OT ★★★★
8. Jadyn Davis, QB ★★★★
9. Devon Baxter, EDGE ★★★★
10. Dominic Nichols, EDGE ★★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Sherrone Moore • Record at School: 1-0 (1 year)
Career Record: 1-0 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Kirk Campbell
Defensive Coordinator: Wink Martindale • Location: Ann Arbor, Mich.
Stadium: Michigan Stadium (107,601)

Donovan Edwards

SCOUTING THE WOLVERINES

"The trick for Sherrone [Moore] is to keep the momentum of a national championship culture through all the roster turnover. I think you'll see a lot of familiar [Jim] Harbaugh practices and ideas this first season, because they've got to rebuild before they can put a new signature on the program. ...The defense will lead the way for them; that can help bridge the rebuild on offense. Will [DC] Wink [Martindale] just rip it and blitz? That will be interesting to see. ... They're basically turning over the entire offense, and they need to find some receiver talent for whoever wins that starting job at QB. ... This is going to be a massive transition even though they kept on the interim from last year. They'll take a step back, but maybe not as far as you think."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	3	Fredrick Moore (So.)	81	Peyton O'Leary (Sr.)
WR	8	Tyler Morris (Jr.)	85	C.J. Charleston (Sr.)
WR	82	Semaj Morgan (So.)	12	Kendrick Bell (So.)
LT	78	Myles Hinton (Sr.)	71	Evan Link (So.)
LG	68	Josh Priebe (Sr.)	56	Dominick Giudice (Jr.)
C	51	Greg Crippen (Sr.)	62	Raheem Anderson (Sr.)
RG	58	Giovanni El-Hadi (Sr.)	55	Nathan Efobi (So.)
RT	75	Andrew Gentry (Jr.)	79	Jeffrey Persi (Sr.)
TE	18	**COLSTON LOVELAND (JR.)**	17	Marlin Klein (Jr.)
QB	10	Alex Orji (Jr.)	13	Jack Tuttle (Sr.)
RB	7	Donovan Edwards (Sr.)	20	Kalel Mullings (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	8	**DERRICK MOORE (JR.)**	42	TJ Guy (Sr.)
DT	78	Kenneth Grant (Jr.)	26	Rayshaun Benny (Sr.)
DT	55	**MASON GRAHAM (JR.)**	96	Enow Etta (So.)
DE	0	Josaiah Stewart (Sr.)	52	Kechaun Bennett (Sr.)
ILB	1	Jaishawn Barham (Jr.)	34	Jaydon Hood (Sr.)
ILB	15	Ernest Hausmann (Jr.)	4	Micah Pollard (Jr.)
NB	10	Zeke Berry (Jr.)	18	Ja'Den McBurrows (Sr.)
CB	2	**WILL JOHNSON (JR.)**	24	Myles Pollard (So.)
CB	20	Jyaire Hill (So.)	36	Keshaun Harris (Sr.)
S	7	**MAKARI PAIGE (SR.)**	6	Brandyn Hillman (So.)
S	28	Quinten Johnson (Sr.)	14	Kody Jones (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K		Dominic Zvada (Jr.)	KR	3	Fredrick Moore (So.)
P	19	Tommy Doman (Sr.)	PR	82	Semaj Morgan (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Melanie Maxwell

Nate Carter

SCOUTING THE SPARTANS

[Jonathan] Smith is a great coach, and his offense can really be effective in the Big Ten, but it will be a bumpy transition after the few years that roster has lived through. ... This is a staff that does more with less, which is why they were so good at the last place, but I think there's a resistance from some people at MSU to go back to that [Mark] D'Antonio mentality. ... I think they're bracing for a lot of turnover through the portal windows. They've brought over the Oregon State QB [Aidan Chiles] who will probably be their starter. ... The run game was really bad last year; they need to put everything they can into getting some balance for that offense to be successful in Year 1. ... This is a big transition year. The culture change from [Mel] Tucker to Smith is pretty massive."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)				
WR	4	Jaron Glover (So.)	0	Alante Brown (Sr.)
WR	3	**MONTORIE FOSTER JR. (SR.)**	7	Antonio Gates Jr. (So.)
WR	15	Nick Marsh (Fr.)	11	Aziah Johnson (Fr.)
LT	53	**BRANDON BALDWIN (SR.)**		Luke Newman (Sr.)
LG	71	Kristian Phillips (So.)	68	Gavin Broscious (So.)
C	61	Tanner Miller (Sr.)	54	Cooper Terpstra (Fr.)
RG	72	Dallas Fincher (Sr.)	79	Mercer Luniewski (Fr.)
RT	66	Ashton Lepo (So.)	65	Stanton Ramil (Fr.)
TE	12	Jack Velling (Jr.)	82	Brennan Parachek (So.)
QB	2	Aidan Chiles (So.)	10	Tommy Schuster (Sr.)
RB	5	**NATE CARTER (JR.)**		Kay'Ron Lynch Adams (Sr.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	99	Quindarius Dunnigan (Sr.)		Anthony Jones (So.)
DT	97	Maverick Hansen (Sr.)	75	Ben Nelson (So.)
DT	94	D'Quan Douse (Sr.)	91	Alex VanSumeren (So.)
RUSH	9	Jalen Thompson (So.)	2	Khris Bogle (Sr.)
MLB	5	Jordan Hall (So.)	7	Jordan Turner (Sr.)
WLB	27	**CAL HALADAY (SR.)**	26	Wayne Matthews III (Jr.)
NLB	15	**ANGELO GROSE (SR.)**	23	Darius Snow (Jr.)
CB	25	**CHANCE RUCKER (SO.)**		Edward Woods (Sr.)
CB	0	**CHARLES BRANTLEY (JR.)**	6	Ade Willie (Jr.)
SS	43	**MALIK SPENCER (JR.)**	21	**DILLON TATUM (JR.)**
FS	34	Khalil Majeed (Jr.)	36	Brandon Lewis (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	97	Jonathan Kim (Sr.)	KR	0 Alante Brown (Sr.)
P	96	Ryan Eckley (So.)	PR	0 Alante Brown (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Nick Wosika-USA TODAY Sports

MICHIGAN STATE SPARTANS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 58 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 13 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 2-7 BIG TEN

OFFENSE The Aidan Chiles era at quarterback is ready to begin at Michigan State, with Jonathan Smith's low-ego approach in his first year as head coach a welcomed change. Both arrive from Oregon State and offer reasons to be bullish on the future. Chiles is a strong-armed dual-threat passer who saw bits of playing time as a true freshman in 2023 at Oregon State behind DJ Uiagalelei. Chiles completed 69 percent of his passes for the Beavers, with four touchdowns and no interceptions. He has the capacity to be one of the Big Ten's best someday, but first he needs to show the ability to make reads and settle into the role.

Smith's Oregon State teams yielded one of the best offensive fronts and run-first systems in the country over the last two seasons. The Spartans have questions on the offensive line, but Oregon State transfer Tanner Miller at center can help glue things together.

Quick-cutting Nate Carter produced 798 yards rushing in 2023 and is a nice fit for Smith's get-north running scheme. Senior wideout Montorie Foster Jr. had 43 catches last year, including the occasional one-handed highlight. Freshman Nick Marsh is a future star.

Oregon State transfer Jack Velling was a second-team All-Pac 12 tight end in 2023, and he'll test Big Ten secondaries, especially in the red zone.

DEFENSE New coordinator Joe Rossi comes from Minnesota, where he built some of the best statistical defenses in the Big Ten prior to a step backward last year. The rebuilding job facing Rossi is steep; the Spartans ranked 13th or worse in the Big Ten in total defense in each of the past three seasons.

This unit is thin at defensive tackle after Derrick Harmon and Simeon Barrow entered the portal. Sixth-year senior Maverick Hansen is rugged and reliable. Transfer D'Quan Douse started 20 games at Georgia Tech and was solid in the spring.

Linebacker and safety are team strengths. Jordan Hall is an emerging star at Mike linebacker. Junior safety Malik Spencer is quick and sturdy.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Jonathan Kim was honorable mention All-Big Ten, going 13-of-18 with four field goals from 50 yards or beyond. Punter Ryan Eckley ranked second in the Big Ten and eighth in FBS with a 46.8-yard punting average.

FINAL ANALYSIS If the offensive line can help establish a respectable run game, Smith's use of Chiles on play-action passing, throwback screens and deep shots could entertain fans and put Michigan State into bowl contention. But questions in the trenches on both sides of the ball make it difficult to expect first-year magic for Smith's Spartans.

2024 SCHEDULE	
Aug. 31	Florida Atlantic
Sept. 7	at Maryland
Sept. 14	Louisiana
Sept. 21	at Boston College
Sept. 28	Ohio State
Oct. 5	at Oregon
Oct. 19	Iowa
Oct. 26	at Michigan
Nov. 2	Indiana
Nov. 16	at Illinois
Nov. 23	Purdue
Nov. 30	Rutgers

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 2-7 BIG TEN)			
Sept. 1	Central Michigan	W	31-7
Sept. 9	Richmond	W	45-14
Sept. 16	Washington	L	7-41
Sept. 23	Maryland	L	9-31
Sept. 30	at Iowa	L	16-26
Oct. 14	at Rutgers	L	24-27
Oct. 21	Michigan	L	0-49
Oct. 28	at Minnesota	L	12-27
Nov. 4	Nebraska	W	20-17
Nov. 11	at Ohio State	L	3-38
Nov. 18	at Indiana	W	24-21
Nov. 24	Penn State	L	0-42

TOP 10 RECRUITS*	
1. Brady Pretzlaff, LB	★★★★
2. Payton Stewart, OT	★★★★
3. Nick Marsh, WR	★★★★
4. Alessio Milivojevic, QB	★★★
5. Jaylan Brown, WR	★★★
6. Rustin Young, OL	★★★
7. Rakeem Johnson, OL	★★★
8. Justin Denson Jr., S	★★★
9. Kekai Burnett, DL	★★★
10. Mikeshun Beeler, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jonathan Smith • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 34-35 (6 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Brian Lindgren • Defensive Coordinator: Joe Rossi • Location: East Lansing, Mich.
Stadium: Spartan Stadium (75,005)

MINNESOTA GOLDEN GOPHERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 55 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 12 | 2023 RECORD: 6-7, 3-6 BIG TEN

OFFENSE The Golden Gophers' success hinges on New Hampshire transfer quarterback Max Brosmer being a substantial upgrade over an inconsistent Athan Kaliakmanis last season. Brosmer, a senior who led FCS in passing a year ago, has shown himself to be a quick study. He's also a budding leader and was named a team captain during spring practices.

Wideout Daniel Jackson, an All-Big Ten second-teamer in 2023, is a proven No. 1 target, but otherwise, there are question marks.

Freshman tailback Darius Taylor led the Big Ten in rushing after the first month of last season, but nagging injuries sidelined him for the middle of the season. Four returning offensive line starters, including stud left tackle Aireontae Ersery, will help head coach P.J. Fleck do what he loves to do most: run the ball.

DEFENSE Defensive coordinator Joe Rossi left for the same job at Michigan State, and Fleck hired Rutgers linebacker coach Corey Hetherman as the new DC. Hetherman will use multiple fronts and spent spring ball simplifying the scheme to allow players to play faster.

All-Big Ten-caliber LB Cody Lindenberg returns after a frustrating and injury-marred season, while Devon Williams and Maverick Baranowski have added necessary seasoning.

All-America safety Tyler Nubin went to the NFL, so the Golden Gophers will need to replace his leadership and playmaking in the back end. Four-star recruit Koi Perich will try to help fill those big shoes.

Rush end Jah Joyner led the team with 46 pressures last season. Finding a replacement for nose tackle Kyler Baugh, a reliable anchor in the middle, is the second-biggest need after Nubin's heir.

SPECIALISTS The Big Ten Kicker of the Year, Dragan Kesich, returns after making 23-of-27 field goals last season. Punter Mark Crawford is also back but is looking for more distance on his boots. New special teams coordinator Bob Ligashesky will need to jumpstart a non-threatening return game. Quentin Redding has been Minnesota's primary returner for the last few seasons, but competition might be coming to dislodge him.

FINAL ANALYSIS After two nine-win seasons, Minnesota took a step back to 6-7 a year ago, but the Golden Gophers' 13 returning starters and a potential upgrade at quarterback put them in a position for a winning season this fall. Another tough schedule looms, and to return to a nine-win level, Minnesota will need to strike a better run-pass balance. And on defense, they will need to cut down on explosive plays to boost a total defense that slipped from the top 10 to 56th a year ago.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	North Carolina
Sept. 7	Rhode Island
Sept. 14	Nevada
Sept. 21	Iowa
Sept. 28	at Michigan
Oct. 5	USC
Oct. 12	at UCLA
Oct. 26	Maryland
Nov. 2	at Illinois
Nov. 9	at Rutgers
Nov. 23	Penn State
Nov. 30	at Wisconsin

2023 RESULTS (6-7, 3-6 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	Nebraska	W	13-10
Sept. 9	Eastern Michigan	W	25-6
Sept. 16	at North Carolina	L	13-31
Sept. 23	at Northwestern (ot)	L	34-37
Sept. 30	Louisiana	W	35-24
Oct. 7	Michigan	L	10-52
Oct. 21	at Iowa	W	12-10
Oct. 28	Michigan State	W	27-12
Nov. 4	Illinois	L	26-27
Nov. 11	at Purdue	L	30-49
Nov. 18	at Ohio State	L	3-37
Nov. 25	Wisconsin	L	14-28
Dec. 26	vs. Bowling Green #	W	30-24

#Quick Lane Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Koi Perich, S	★★★★
2.	Nathan Roy, OL	★★★★
3.	Ohifame Ijeboi, RB	★★★★
4.	Mo Saine, DL	★★★★
5.	Samuel Madu, CB	★★★★
6.	Riley Sunram, DL	★★★★
7.	Brett Carroll, OL	★★★
8.	Julian Johnson, TE	★★★
9.	Jacob Simpson, TE	★★★
10.	Drake Lindsey, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: P.J. Fleck • Record at School: 50-34 (7 years) • Career Record: 80-56 (11 years)
Offensive Coordinators: Greg Harbaugh Jr., Matt Simon • Defensive Coordinator: Corey Hetherman
Location: Minneapolis, Minn. • Stadium: Huntington Bank Stadium (50,805)

Darius Taylor

David Banks-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE GOLDEN GOPHERS

"They're never dull, that's for sure. ... I think [head coach] P.J. [Fleck] chased UCLA and some other jobs pretty hard to get out of there, and it didn't happen for him. ... The transfer quarterback from FCS [Max Brosmer] could be a really exciting player in that offensive system. He's already a captain for them, so they really believe he can be a game-changer for their offense. ... The new defensive coordinator [Corey Hetherman] is known for a big attacking scheme from when he was an FCS coordinator [at James Madison]. It will be interesting to see how that translates to this league. Minnesota doesn't have the kind of personnel that can allow you to blitz like that."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	9	**DANIEL JACKSON (SR.)**	15	Kenric Lanier II (So.)
WR		Tyler Williams (Fr.)	11	Elijah Spencer (Sr.)
WR	0	Le'Meke Brockington (Jr.)	5	T.J. McWilliams (So.)
LT	69	**AIREONTAE ERSERY (SR.)**	59	Tony Nelson (Jr.)
LG	75	**TYLER COOPER (SR.)**	65	Greg Johnson (So.)
C	65	Greg Johnson (So.)	70	Cade McConnell (Jr.)
RG	77	**QUINN CARROLL (SR.)**	78	Ashton Beers (Jr.)
RT	71	**MARTES LEWIS (JR.)**	60	Phillip Daniels (So.)
TE	86	Jameson Geers (Jr.)	87	Nick Kallerup (Sr.)
QB	16	Max Brosmer (Sr.)	3	Drake Lindsey (Fr.)
RB	1	Darius Taylor (So.)	2	Sieh Bangura (Sr.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE	17	Jah Joyner (Jr.)	0	Anthony Smith (Jr.)
DT	97	**JALEN LOGAN-REDDING (JR.)**	8	Darnell Jefferies (Sr.)
DT	91	**DEVEN EASTERN (JR.)**	96	Logan Richter (Sr.)
DE	92	**DANNY STRIGGOW (SR.)**		Jaxon Howard (So.)
LB	45	**CODY LINDENBERG (JR.)**	9	Devon Williams (Jr.)
LB	6	**MAVERICK BARANOWSKI (JR.)**	49	Matt Kingsbury (So.)
NB	20	**JACK HENDERSON (SR.)**	21	Craig McDonald (Jr.)
CB	5	**JUSTIN WALLEY (SR.)**	24	Tariq Watson (Jr.)
CB	2	Ethan Robinson (Sr.)	4	ZaQuan Bryan (So.)
SS	12	**DARIUS GREEN (JR.)**	27	Jai'Onte' McMillan (Sr.)
FS	16	Coleman Bryson (Jr.)		Koi Perich (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Dragan Kesich (Sr.)	KR	81	Quentin Redding (Jr.)
P	96	Mark Crawford (Sr.)	PR	81	Quentin Redding (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Ty Robinson

Dylan Widger-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE CORNHUSKERS

"They're going to break through this year, it's just a question of how big. They should definitely be bowling. ...It's all about the quarterback [true freshman Dylan Raiola]. They've tried to slow play it as much as possible, but he's clearly their best option, the most talented, the guy who makes the system work. [Matt Rhule] has done a great job reworking the offensive talent; they're going to have some breakout wide receivers, and they have a really deep group of running backs. ... [DC] Tony White is going to be a head coach soon, but getting him back for another year is just huge for them. I thought the shift to the 3-3 worked out really well for them, and they're starting to look like old, or legendary Nebraska, with the size and talent up front on defense.

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	15	Malachi Coleman (So.)	19	Jaylen Lloyd (So.)
WR	82	Isaiah Garcia-Castaneda (Sr.)	18	Isaiah Neyor (Sr.)
WR	80	Jahmal Banks (Sr.)	11	Demetrius Bell (Fr.)
LT	65	Teddy Prochazka (Jr.)	77	Gunnar Gottula (Fr.)
LG	56	Micah Mazzccua (Sr.)	59	Henry Lutovsky (Jr.)
C	**66**	**BEN SCOTT (SR.)**	51	Justin Evans (So.)
RG	**69**	**TURNER CORCORAN (SR.)**	68	Ru'Quan Buckley (Jr.)
RT	**54**	**BRYCE BENHART (SR.)**	75	Tyler Knaack (So.)
TE	**24**	**THOMAS FIDONE II (JR.)**	**87**	**NATE BOERKIRCHER (JR.)**
QB	15	Dylan Raiola (Fr.)	**10**	**HEINRICH HAARBERG (JR.)**
RB	22	Gabe Ervin Jr. (Jr.)	23	Dante Dowdell (So.)

DEFENSE (7)

DT	10	Jimari Butler (Jr.)	11	Cameron Lenhardt (So.)
NT	**9**	**TY ROBINSON (SR.)**	44	Riley Van Poppel (So.)
DT	**0**	**NASH HUTMACHER (SR.)**	16	Elijah Jeudy (Jr.)
LB	**5**	**JOHN BULLOCK (SR.)**	56	Stefon Thompson (Jr.)
LB	42	Mikai Gbayor (Jr.)	43	Michael Booker III (Jr.)
LB	33	Javin Wright (Sr.)	48	MJ Sherman (Sr.)
ROV	**2**	**ISAAC GIFFORD (SR.)**	18	Princewell Umanmielan (So.)
CB	24	Marques Buford Jr. (Jr.)	28	Ethan Nation (So.)
CB	**31**	**TOMMI HILL (SR.)**	21	Dwight Bootle II (Fr.)
S	**13**	**MALCOLM HARTZOG (JR.)**	26	Koby Bretz (Jr.)
S	**8**	**DESHON SINGLETON (SR.)**	23	Blye Hill (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	30	Tristan Alvano (So.)	KR	14 Rahmir Johnson (Sr.)
P	18	Brian Buschini (Sr.)	PR	28 Ethan Nation (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

NEBRASKA CORNHUSKERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 33 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 7 | 2023 RECORD: 5-7, 3-6 BIG TEN

OFFENSE The biggest offseason news? Take your pick: the surprise departure of athletic director Trev Alberts for Texas A&M just before spring practice — replaced by Troy Dannen — or highly ranked quarterback recruit Dylan Raiola's decision to withdraw his Georgia commitment and sign with Nebraska. Raiola, son of former Husker All-America center Dominic Raiola and nephew of Husker offensive line coach Donovan Raiola, has provided offensive optimism after a disappointing season.

Head coach Matt Rhule brought in Glenn Thomas, with whom he worked at Temple and Baylor, to coach quarterbacks and serve as co-offensive coordinator with Marcus Satterfield.

Jahmal Banks and Malachi Coleman are among receivers who must step up if the passing game is to thrive, with tight ends, including Thomas Fidone II, also in the receiving mix.

Quarterback Heinrich Haarberg was the leading rusher last season. That will change, with more emphasis on passing and a healthy Gabe Ervin Jr. leading the running backs. The line has experience, including tackle Bryce Benhardt, who has a school-record-tying 41 career starts.

DEFENSE Expect this season's defense to reflect last season's, after the Huskers ranked 11th nationally and fifth in the Big Ten in total defense. Another offseason "win" for Nebraska was the retention of defensive coordinator Tony White, reportedly a candidate for UCLA's head-coaching job in February. White's stated goal is to be the No. 1 defense nationally.

Three of the top four tacklers return. Rover Isaac Gifford led the team with 86 tackles, 6.5 of them for a loss, and eight pass breakups. Linebacker Javin Wright was tied for second with 51 tackles. Linebacker John Bullock was credited with 50. Those three wore single-digit jersey numbers, an honor bestowed in fall camp on the 10 "toughest guys" as voted by the team. Other defensive returnees who wore single digits include linemen Nash "The Polar Bear" Hutmacher and Ty Robinson, the foundation of the Huskers' 3-3-5 base alignment.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Tristan Alvano and punter Brian Buschini return. Alvano was perfect on extra points and made 9-of-15 field-goal attempts, including a 55-yarder. Buschini averaged 40.7 yards, with 20-of-57 punts placed inside the 20. Punt returns need to improve.

FINAL ANALYSIS In previous stops at Temple and Baylor, Rhule's teams went 10-4 and 11-3, respectively, in his third seasons, after going 2-10 and 1-11 in his first seasons. He's on a faster pace at Nebraska. The schedule seems favorable for momentum and bowl eligibility. Nebraska's last bowl trip was in 2016, a drought that should end in 2024.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	UTEP
Sept. 7	Colorado
Sept. 14	Northern Iowa
Sept. 21	Illinois
Sept. 28	at Purdue
Oct. 5	Rutgers
Oct. 19	at Indiana
Oct. 26	at Ohio State
Nov. 2	UCLA
Nov. 16	at USC
Nov. 23	Wisconsin
Nov. 29	at Iowa

2023 RESULTS (5-7, 3-6 BIG TEN)

Aug. 31	at Minnesota	L	10-13
Sept. 9	at Colorado	L	14-36
Sept. 16	Northern Illinois	W	35-1
Sept. 23	Louisiana Tech	W	28-14
Sept. 30	Michigan	L	7-45
Oct. 6	at Illinois	W	20-7
Oct. 21	Northwestern	W	17-9
Oct. 28	Purdue	W	31-14
Nov. 4	at Michigan State	L	17-20
Nov. 11	Maryland	L	10-13
Nov. 18	at Wisconsin (ot)	L	17-24
Nov. 24	Iowa	L	10-13

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Carter Nelson, TE	★★★★
2.	Grant Brix, OL	★★★★
3.	Dylan Raiola, QB	★★★★
4.	Mario Buford, CB	★★★★
5.	Roger Gradney, S	★★★
6.	Dae'vonn Hall, WR	★★★
7.	Jacory Barney, WR	★★★
8.	Vincent Shavers, LB	★★★
9.	Gibson Pyle, OL	★★★
10.	Preston Taumua, OL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Matt Rhule • Record at School: 5-7 (1 year) • Career Record: 52-50 (8 years)
Offensive Coordinators: Marcus Satterfield, Glenn Thomas • Defensive Coordinator: Tony White
Location: Lincoln, Neb. • Stadium: Memorial Stadium (85,458)

NORTHWESTERN WILDCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 65 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 16 | 2023 RECORD: 8-5, 5-4 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Despite eight wins in 2023, head coach David Braun recognized that upgrades were needed on offense. He hired Zach Lujan, the 28-year-old offensive coordinator from back-to-back FCS national champion South Dakota State, to steer the unit. Lujan uses wide zone concepts to get ball-carriers in space and take some pressure off the line.

Running back Cam Porter has 334 career carries and has twice led the team in rushing. Joseph Himon II is a big-play threat, while sophomore Caleb Komolafe might have the highest ceiling of any back. Veteran wideouts Bryce Kirtz and A.J. Henning both return, and there's excitement around younger players like Ricky Ahumaraeze. Veteran tight ends Marshall Lang and Thomas Gordon will retain significant roles.

Line depth is a concern, especially after Josh Priebe's transfer to Michigan, but Ben Wrather is an experienced center, and the team added two transfer tackles (Matt Keeler and Jack Bailey).

The big question is at quarterback after the offseason transfer of Brendan Sullivan. Northwestern's recent success at the position has come through the portal, and that could be the case again.

DEFENSE Braun turned over the defense to Tim McGarigle, a former Northwestern linebacker who oversaw that position the past six years. A defensive line that became a surprise strength last fall returns almost entirely intact. The group features sacks leader Aidan Hubbard, along with Anto Saka, Jaylen Pate, Richie Hagarty and other pass-rush options.

Northwestern lost three notable defensive backs to the portal but still feels good about the group with safeties Coco Azema and Devin Turner anchoring the secondary, along with cornerback Theran Johnson and others. The Wildcats' pass defense ranked 15th nationally last fall.

Xander Mueller leads the linebackers after posting five sacks, 10.5 tackles for a loss and three interceptions. Mueller and junior Kenny Soares Jr. form a nice tandem, although McGarigle must build depth in the middle.

SPECIALISTS Northwestern returns its primary specialists in kicker Jack Olsen and punter Hunter Renner, although neither finished among the Big Ten's best and could face competition. Henning gave the return game a jolt in 2023 and returns alongside Azema, an effective kick returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS After earning the permanent coaching job under uniquely difficult conditions, Braun can truly put his mark on the program this fall. The defense should be formidable again, especially if a few back-end gaps are filled. Although the offense could take time to jell, the Lujan hire and philosophical shift will better position Northwestern for the new Big Ten.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Miami (Ohio)
Sept. 7	Duke
Sept. 14	Eastern Illinois
Sept. 21	at Washington
Oct. 5	Indiana
Oct. 12	at Maryland
Oct. 19	Wisconsin
Oct. 26	at Iowa
Nov. 2	at Purdue
Nov. 16	Ohio State
Nov. 23	at Michigan
Nov. 30	Illinois

2023 RESULTS (8-5, 5-4 BIG TEN)

Sept. 3	at Rutgers	L	7-24
Sept. 9	UTEP	W	38-7
Sept. 16	at Duke	L	14-38
Sept. 23	Minnesota (ot)	W	37-34
Sept. 30	Penn State	L	13-41
Oct. 7	Howard	W	23-20
Oct. 21	at Nebraska	L	9-17
Oct. 28	Maryland	W	33-27
Nov. 4	vs. Iowa # (ot)	L	7-10
Nov. 11	at Wisconsin	W	24-10
Nov. 18	Purdue	W	23-15
Nov. 25	at Illinois	W	45-43
Dec. 23	vs. Utah %	W	14-7

#Chicago %Las Vegas Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Idrys Cotton, OL	★★★
2.	Callen Campbell, EDGE	★★★
3.	Troy Regovich, DL	★★★
4.	Dashun Reeder, RB	★★★
5.	Ryan Boe, QB	★★★
6.	Braxton Strong, EDGE	★★★
7.	Hayden Eligon II, WR	★★★
8.	Matthew Smith, LB	★★★
9.	Dennis Rahouski, DL	★★★
10.	Pat Schaller, TE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: David Braun • Record at School: 8-5 (1 year) • Career Record: 8-5 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Zach Lujan • Defensive Coordinator: Tim McGarigle • Location: Evanston, Ill. • Stadium: Ryan Field (47,130)

Cam Porter

SCOUTING THE WILDCATS

"David Braun might go down as one of the best interim head coaches in the history of the game. What he was able to do to keep that locker room committed and the culture going after [Pat] Fitzgerald was really remarkable. ... Really curious how the [Zach] Lujan hire at offensive coordinator works out for them. SDSU ran a lot of motion and shift and did a good job tailoring to the roster, and that's something that Northwestern has really struggled with over the last few seasons. This is a team in desperate need of a consistent offensive identity they can recruit to."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	17	**BRYCE KIRTZ (SR.)**	10	Ricky Ahumaraeze (So.)
WR	8	**A.J. HENNING (SR.)**	19	Reggie Fleurima (Jr.)
WR	7	Calvin Johnson II (Sr.)	16	Frank Covey IV (So.)
LT	72	**CALEB TIERNAN (SR.)**		Jack Bailey (Sr.)
LG	75	Jordan Knox (So.)	73	Deuce McGuire (Jr.)
C	71	**BEN WRATHER (SR.)**	65	Jackson Carsello (Sr.)
RG	74	Nick Herzog (Jr.)	64	Anthony Birsa (So.)
RT	56	**JOSH THOMPSON (SR.)**		Matt Keeler (Jr.)
TE	88	Marshall Lang (Sr.)	87	Thomas Gordon (Sr.)
QB	12	Jack Lausch (Jr.)	3	Ryan Hilinski (Sr.)
RB	4	**CAM PORTER (SR.)**	20	Joseph Himon II (Jr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	41	**JAYLEN PATE (SR.)**	4	Anto Saka (Jr.)
DT	95	**NAJEE STORY (SR.)**	15	Brendan Flakes (Jr.)
DT	90	**CARMINE BASTONE (SR.)**	94	R.J. Pearson (Sr.)
DE	97	**SEAN MCLAUGHLIN (SR.)**	91	Aidan Hubbard (Sr.)
LB	5	Kenny Soares Jr. (Jr.)	33	Braydon Brus (Jr.)
LB	34	**XANDER MUELLER (SR.)**	40	Jason Reynolds II (Jr.)
LB	37	Mac Uihlein (Sr.)	57	Greyson Metz (Sr.)
CB	10	**THERAN JOHNSON (SR.)**	13	Josh Fussell (So.)
CB	12	Evan Smith (Jr.)	7	Ore Adeyi (Sr.)
S	0	Coco Azema (Sr.)	9	Braden Turner (Jr.)
S	8	**DEVIN TURNER (JR.)**	6	Robert Fitzgerald (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	82	Jack Olsen (Sr.)	KR	8	A.J. Henning (Sr.)
P	99	Hunter Renner (Sr.)	PR	8	A.J. Henning (Sr.)

Returning starters in ***BOLD***

Jeff Hanisch-USA TODAY Sports

TreVeyon Henderson

SCOUTING THE BUCKEYES

"It's not national title or bust, but it's certainly beat Michigan or bust, and the expectation is always to win the league. ... This is maybe the most talented roster [Ryan] Day has had since he took over. ... [QB Will] Howard doesn't have to be special; he just has to be smart. That signing didn't turn heads the way some of the other flashier portal quarterbacks might have, but all he has to do is manage and distribute. They're absolutely stacked at other positions. ... Day is a great collaborator; the Chip [Kelly] thing won't be a nuisance or a problem at all. If you believe what Chip's said, that he just wants to focus on ball and not worry with the administrative stuff, this is a fantastic hire for them. ... Nothing really matters until they can get Michigan off their backs in November. The standards here are higher than anywhere else this season."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	**2**	**EMEKA EGBUKA (SR.)**	9	Jayden Ballard (Sr.)
WR	17	Carnell Tate (So.)	11	Brandon Inniss (So.)
WR	4	Jeremiah Smith (Fr.)	7	Kyion Grayes (Jr.)
LT	**71**	**JOSH SIMMONS (SR.)**	65	Zen Michalski (Sr.)
LG	**74**	**DONOVAN JACKSON (SR.)**	68	George Fitzpatrick (Jr.)
C	56	Seth McLaughlin (Sr.)	**75**	**CARSON HINZMAN (JR.)**
RG	**70**	**JOSH FRYAR (SR.)**	66	Enokk Vimahi (Sr.)
RT	51	Luke Montgomery (So.)	77	Tegra Tshabola (Jr.)
TE	89	Will Kacmarek (Sr.)	88	Gee Scott Jr. (Sr.)
QB	18	Will Howard (Sr.)	33	Devin Brown (Jr.)
RB	**32**	**TREVEYON HENDERSON (SR.)**	1	Quinshon Judkins (Jr.)

DEFENSE (9)

DE	**33**	**JACK SAWYER (SR.)**	92	Caden Curry (Jr.)
NT	**58**	**TY HAMILTON (SR.)**	98	Kayden McDonald (So.)
DT	**91**	**TYLEIK WILLIAMS (SR.)**	93	Hero Kanu (Jr.)
DE	**44**	**JT TUIMOLOAU (SR.)**	97	Kenyatta Jackson Jr. (Jr.)
MLB	30	Cody Simon (Sr.)	11	C.J. Hicks (Jr.)
WLB	**6**	**SONNY STYLES (JR.)**	2	Kourt Williams II (Sr.)
CB	**10**	**DENZEL BURKE (SR.)**	22	Calvin Simpson-Hunt (So.)
CB	**1**	**DAVISON IGBINOSUN (JR.)**	24	Jermaine Mathews Jr. (So.)
NB	**7**	**JORDAN HANCOCK (SR.)**	4	Lorenzo Styles Jr. (Sr.)
SS	**8**	**LATHAN RANSOM (SR.)**	3	Ja'Had Carter (Sr.)
FS	2	Caleb Downs (So.)	25	Malik Hartford (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	38	Jayden Fielding (Jr.)	**KR**	4	Lorenzo Styles Jr. (Sr.)
P	42	Joe McGuire (So.)	**PR**	2	Caleb Downs (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Joseph Maiorana-USA TODAY Sports

OHIO STATE BUCKEYES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 2 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 1 | 2023 RECORD: 11-2, 8-1 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Ohio State lost an elite weapon in wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr., but this is still a highly enviable unit that is loaded at every position. Head coach Ryan Day is ceding the play-calling duties to his lifelong mentor — former UCLA boss Chip Kelly.

The Buckeyes outrushed foes by just 19 yards per game last year, but that figures to improve with the return of TreVeyon Henderson, the addition of former Ole Miss star Quinshon Judkins, a pair of quarterbacks who will be running threats and a revamped offensive line.

And when Kelly leans on the passing game, he'll choose from a list of targets that includes mega-talents Emeka Egbuka, Carnell Tate and true freshman Jeremiah Smith, who Day says "has a chance to be special."

Former Kansas State QB Will Howard will have the reins ahead of Devin Brown, but both could be used with a long journey ahead.

DEFENSE Coordinator Jim Knowles steadily has built his 4-2-5 defense and now has all the pieces in place. Every listed starter has played meaningful football, and 10 are upperclassmen. The lone youngster is Alabama transfer Caleb Downs, who will slot right in at free safety after an All-America freshman season.

While Downs should be one of the nation's most impactful transfers, the D is littered with players who put their NFL dreams on hold to chase a title. The front features bookends Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau and interior standout Tyleik Williams.

Cody Simon and Sonny Styles can't match departed linebackers Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers in experience, but they don't lack ability. Styles shifted from safety so Downs could line up next to Lathan Ransom and cover men Denzel Burke, Davison Igbinosun and Jordan Hancock.

A disruptive D-line, highly athletic LBs and an elite secondary may add up to the best defense in the country — although it will be difficult to improve on last year's stingy 11.2 points allowed per game.

SPECIALISTS Jayden Fielding is coming off a 16-of-20 season on field-goal attempts and is solid on kickoffs. Joe McGuire takes over as the new punter and holder. OSU didn't produce much wow factor on runbacks last year but likely will turn to Downs to return punts.

FINAL ANALYSIS There's no question the Buckeyes have one of the elite rosters in college football. The returning players are hungry, the skill is awe-inspiring and even the coaching staff has been beefed up. An October roadie to Oregon figures to be an epic regular-season showcase.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Southern Miss
Sept. 7	Western Michigan
Sept. 21	Marshall
Sept. 28	at Michigan St.
Oct. 5	Iowa
Oct. 12	at Oregon
Oct. 26	Nebraska
Nov. 2	at Penn State
Nov. 9	Purdue
Nov. 16	at Northwestern
Nov. 23	Indiana
Nov. 30	Michigan

2023 RESULTS (11-2, 8-1 BIG TEN)

Sept. 2	at Indiana	W	23-3
Sept. 9	Youngstown State	W	35-7
Sept. 16	WKU	W	63-10
Sept. 23	at Notre Dame	W	17-14
Oct. 7	Maryland	W	37-17
Oct. 14	at Purdue	W	41-7
Oct. 21	Penn State	W	20-12
Oct. 28	at Wisconsin	W	24-10
Nov. 4	at Rutgers	W	35-16
Nov. 11	Michigan State	W	38-3
Nov. 18	Minnesota	W	37-3
Nov. 25	at Michigan	L	24-30
Dec. 29	vs. Missouri #	L	3-14

#Cotton Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jeremiah Smith, WR	★★★★★
2.	Julian Sayin, QB	★★★★★
3.	Aaron Scott, CB	★★★★
4.	Mylan Graham, WR	★★★★
5.	Eddrick Houston, EDGE	★★★★
6.	Bryce West, CB	★★★★
7.	Dominic Kirks, DL	★★★★
8.	Gabe Vansickle, OL	★★★★
9.	Air Noland, QB	★★★★
10.	James Peoples, RB	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ryan Day • Record at School: 56-8 (5+ years) • Career Record: 56-8 (5+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Chip Kelly • Defensive Coordinator: Jim Knowles • Location: Columbus, Ohio
Stadium: Ohio Stadium (102,780)

OREGON DUCKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 3 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 2 | 2023 RECORD: 12-2, 8-1 PAC-12

OFFENSE The Ducks had one of the most explosive (531.4 ypg) and high-scoring (44.2 ppg) offenses in all of college football last year. Offensive coordinator Will Stein brought in former Oklahoma quarterback Dillon Gabriel to keep it that way.

The Ducks lost a slew of top weapons to the draft, but the cupboard is far from bare. Tez Johnson, the program's single-season receptions leader, returns, along with veterans Traeshon Holden and Gary Bryant Jr. Wide receivers coach Junior Adams bolstered the room by snagging former Texas A&M wideout Evan Stewart in the portal and signing blue-chip recruits.

Rimington Trophy-winning center Jackson Powers-Johnson has turned pro, but plenty of contributors, headlined by Iapani Laloulu and a pair of starting bookend tackles, return to anchor another strong offensive line.

DEFENSE Oregon's defense made significant strides last season, getting to the quarterback for 34 sacks. However, the Ducks will have a new-look interior defensive line in 2024 after losing four veterans. Houston transfer Jamaree Caldwell enters the mix to provide size and push. Defensive end Jordan Burch may be the best of the bunch, but fans are excited about the growth of Matayo Uiagalelei, Teitum Tuioti and Blake Purchase.

An athletic duo of Jestin Jacobs and Jeffrey Bassa should form one of the better linebacker tandems nationally, while promising up-and-comers Devon Jackson and Jerry Mixon will likely earn more snaps.

The secondary will see a shift as well. Fortunately for Oregon, experienced transfers Jabbar Muhammad (Washington) and Kam Alexander (UTSA) bulk up a cornerbacks group loaded with returning talent including Jahlil Florence and Nikko Reed.

Former Kansas State DB Kobe Savage and veteran Tysheem Johnson headline the safety group. Defensive backs coach Chris Hampton plans to shore up depth with players like Brandon Johnson (Duke transfer) and Khamari Terrell among others.

SPECIALISTS The Ducks move on from their all-time scoring leader, kicker Camden Lewis, but they may improve with Oregon State transfer Atticus Sappington. Ross James should boom punts once again after averaging a strong 48.4 yards per boot in 2023. Oregon desperately needs to improve in the return game.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Ducks boast one of the most talented rosters in college football and should be instant contenders in the new-look Big Ten. Gabriel should keep Stein's offense producing at an elite clip, but Oregon will need new faces to step up for its defense to continue ascending.

2023 RESULTS (12-2, 8-1 PAC-12)

Sept. 2	Portland State	W	81-7
Sept. 9	at Texas Tech	W	38-30
Sept. 16	Hawaii	W	55-10
Sept. 23	Colorado	W	42-6
Sept. 30	at Stanford	W	42-6
Oct. 14	at Washington	L	33-36
Oct. 21	Washington State	W	38-24
Oct. 28	at Utah	W	35-6
Nov. 4	California	W	63-19
Nov. 11	USC	W	36-27
Nov. 18	at Arizona State	W	49-13
Nov. 24	Oregon State	W	31-7
Dec. 1	vs. Washington #	L	31-34
Jan. 1	vs. Liberty %	W	45-6

#Las Vegas %Fiesta Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 24	at Hawaii
Aug. 31	Idaho
Sept. 7	Texas Tech
Sept. 14	Boise State
Sept. 28	at UCLA
Oct. 5	Michigan State
Oct. 12	Ohio State
Oct. 19	at Purdue
Oct. 26	Illinois
Nov. 2	at Michigan
Nov. 9	Maryland
Nov. 16	at Wisconsin
Nov. 30	Washington

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Gatlin Bair, WR	★★★★
2.	Aaron Flowers, S	★★★★
3.	Elijah Rushing, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Ify Obidegwu, CB	★★★★
5.	Dillon Gresham, WR	★★★★
6.	Jeremiah McClellan, WR	★★★★
7.	Aydin Breland, DL	★★★★
8.	Dakoda Fields, CB	★★★★
9.	Kingston Lopa, S	★★★★
10.	Sione Laulea, CB	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dan Lanning • Record at School: 22-5 (2 years)
Career Record: 22-5 (2 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Will Stein
Defensive Coordinator: Tosh Lupoi • Location: Eugene, Ore.
Stadium: Autzen Stadium (54,000)

Tez Johnson

SCOUTING THE DUCKS

"They're a playoff contender and can battle anyone in the new league. Watch out for these guys this season because [offensive coordinator] Will Stein and [quarterback] Dillon Gabriel make a lot of sense together. When you look at how Stein developed guys at UTSA, Gabriel already having a lot of game experience, they could really light a fire. ... Where the program has really evolved is the front seven on defense. They're as talented and well-coached as any of the Big 2 schools [Ohio State and Michigan] at these positions, and they can get after it. That's Lanning's fingerprints on the program. ... Of the four schools coming into the league from the Pac-12, this is the most complete and dangerous."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	7	Evan Stewart (Jr.)	99	Jurrion Dickey (So.)
WR	15	**TEZ JOHNSON (SR.)**	2	**GARY BRYANT JR. (JR.)**
WR	1	Traeshon Holden (Sr.)	17	Kyler Kasper (So.)
LT	76	**JOSH CONERLY JR. (JR.)**	71	George Silva (Sr.)
LG	55	**MARCUS HARPER II (SR.)**	74	Dave Iuli (Jr.)
C	72	Iapani Laloulu (So.)	55	Marcus Harper II (Sr.)
RG	77	Matthew Bedford (Sr.)	74	Dave Iuli (Jr.)
RT	65	**AJANI CORNELIUS (SR.)**	73	Kawika Rogers (So.)
TE	3	**TERRANCE FERGUSON (SR.)**	88	Patrick Herbert (Sr.)
QB	8	Dillon Gabriel (Sr.)	5	Dante Moore (So.)
RB	20	Jordan James (Jr.)	6	Noah Whittington (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DT	95	Keyon Ware-Hudson (Sr.)	52	Ben Roberts (So.)
DT	90	Jamaree Caldwell (Sr.)	54	A'Mauri Washington (So.)
DE	10	Matayo Uiagalelei (So.)	93	My'Keil Gardner (Fr.)
DE	1	**JORDAN BURCH (SR.)**	29	Ashton Porter (Fr.)
ILB	4	Jestin Jacobs (Sr.)	26	Devon Jackson (So.)
ILB	2	**JEFFREY BASSA (SR.)**	28	Bryce Boettcher (Sr.)
OLB	44	Teitum Tuitoi (So.)	32	Emar'rion Winston (So.)
CB	7	Jabbar Muhammad (Sr.)	18	Kam Alexander (Sr.)
CB	6	**JAHLIL FLORENCE (JR.)**	9	Nikko Reed (Sr.)
SS	5	Kobe Savage (Sr.)		Brandon Johnson (Sr.)
FS	0	**TYSHEEM JOHNSON (SR.)**	21	Aaron Flowers (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	36	Atticus Sappington (Jr.)	KR	6	Noah Whittington (Jr.)
P	92	Ross James (Jr.)	PR	15	Tez Johnson (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Rob Schumacher/The Republic

Kaytron Allen

SCOUTING THE NITTANY LIONS

"They've been the definition of the best-of-the-good programs for a while now. They're never great. They would've made a 12-team playoff last year, but they were so noticeably behind Ohio State and Michigan that it didn't really matter. The expectation is to compete with those schools, and they've almost always trailed them under James Franklin. ... The season is on [QB Drew] Allar and how he develops with another new OC [Andy Kotelnicki]. They haven't scared elite programs with their offensive skill position guys since the Saquon Barkley and Trace McSorley days. You can talk about a million other things, but that's the real difference between them and the conference leaders. OSU and Michigan scare you with their talent. They have to hit that next level as an offense."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	3	Julian Fleming (Sr.)	7	Kaden Saunders (So.)
WR	6	Harrison Wallace III (Jr.)	5	Omari Evans (Jr.)
WR	7	Kaden Saunders (So.)	2	Liam Clifford (Jr.)
LT	66	Drew Shelton (Jr.)	74	J'ven Williams (Fr.)
LG	56	**JB NELSON (SR.)**	71	Olaivavega Ioane (So.)
C	53	Nick Dawkins (Sr.)	50	Cooper Cousins (Fr.)
RG	77	**SAL WORMLEY (SR.)**	63	Alex Birchmeier (Fr.)
RT	68	Anthony Donkoh (Fr.)	72	Nolan Rucci (Jr.)
TE	44	**TYLER WARREN (SR.)**	16	Khalil Dinkins (Jr.)
QB	15	**DREW ALLAR (JR.)**	9	Beau Pribula (So.)
RB	10	**NICHOLAS SINGLETON (JR.)**	13	Kaytron Allen (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DT	28	**ZANE DURANT (JR.)**	99	Coziah Izzard (Sr.)
DT	91	**DVON ELLIES (SR.)**	51	Hakeem Beamon (Sr.)
DE	11	**ABDUL CARTER (JR.)**	19	Jameial Lyons (So.)
DE	33	Dani Dennis-Sutton (Jr.)	36	Zuriah Fisher (Sr.)
OLB	13	Tony Rojas (So.)	24	Ta'Mere Robinson (Fr.)
ILB	41	**KOBE KING (SR.)**	43	Tyler Elsdon (Sr.)
OLB	0	Dom DeLuca (Jr.)	48	Kaveion Keys (Fr.)
CB	5	Cam Miller (Jr.)	3	Jalen Kimber (Sr.)
CB	4	A.J. Harris (So.)	7	Zion Tracy (So.)
S	1	**JAYLEN REED (SR.)**	6	Zakee Wheatley (Jr.)
S	2	**KEVIN WINSTON JR. (JR.)**	27	Lamont Payne (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	94	Ryan Barker (Fr.)	KR	10 Nicholas Singleton (Jr.)
P	95	Riley Thompson (Jr.)	PR	7 Kaden Saunders (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Matthew O'Haren-USA TODAY Sports

PENN STATE NITTANY LIONS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 8 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 4 | 2023 RECORD: 10-3, 7-2 BIG TEN

OFFENSE After a season in which Penn State averaged 36.2 points per game overall but 13.5 against Ohio State and Michigan, James Franklin pried offensive coordinator Andy Kotelnicki from Kansas and gave him a primary mission: Score points against the schedule's best teams.

Kotelnicki's offense thrives with creative formations, motions and shifts, which is good news for quarterback Drew Allar. The junior was among the safest bets in college football last season, with his 25:2 touchdown-to-interception ratio. But Franklin wants more than a safe bet.

Allar needs help from his wideouts. Ohio State transfer Julian Fleming, the former Pennsylvania alpha recruit who originally chose the Buckeyes, says he's finally healthy and has been a polished practice presence.

Nicholas Singleton and Kaytron Allen (combined 4.8 ypc last season) anchor a backfield that will play a larger role in the pass game. Tight end Tyler Warren (seven TD catches in 2023) is an All-America candidate, but the line loses three starters, notably All-American Olu Fashanu.

DEFENSE Penn State allowed the fewest total yards and fewest yards per play in 2023 while also posting the most sacks, so new coordinator Tom Allen has a high bar to clear. Allen shifted 6-foot-3, 250-pound linebacker Abdul Carter from linebacker to end, a move Carter suggested. Carter will team with Dani Dennis-Sutton to form an imposing edge threat. Carter and Dennis-Sutton combined for eight sacks last season.

Penn State is four-deep at tackle, with sixth-year seniors in Dvon Ellies and Hakeem Beamon, and fields one of the Big Ten's deepest secondaries, enriched by transfer cornerbacks Jalen Kimber (Florida) and A.J. Harris (Georgia). Tony Rojas is a rising star at linebacker, while safeties Kevin Winston Jr., Jaylen Reed and Zakee Wheatley give Allen options for the "Lion" position that will specialize in big hits and takeaways.

SPECIALISTS New special teams coordinator Andy Lustig's first priority: choosing a kicker to replace All-Big Ten honoree Alex Felkins. Walk-on Ryan Barker took most of the spring-game reps. Australian punter Riley Thompson, who earned All-Big Ten honorable mention recognition, is set after the NCAA approved his two-year eligibility waiver.

FINAL ANALYSIS The last time he replaced both offensive and defensive coordinators in the same offseason, Franklin led Penn State to the 2016 Big Ten title. No promises toward a repeat, but there is promise. The Big Ten is in flux, and the Nittany Lions return an experienced roster. After missing every College Football Playoff in the four-team era, Penn State should host a game this December in the inaugural 12-team version.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at West Virginia
Sept. 7	Bowling Green
Sept. 21	Kent State
Sept. 28	Illinois
Oct. 5	UCLA
Oct. 12	at USC
Oct. 26	at Wisconsin
Nov. 2	Ohio State
Nov. 9	Washington
Nov. 16	at Purdue
Nov. 23	at Minnesota
Nov. 30	Maryland

2023 RESULTS (10-3, 7-2 BIG TEN)

Sept. 2	West Virginia	W	38-15
Sept. 9	Delaware	W	63-7
Sept. 16	at Illinois	W	30-13
Sept. 23	Iowa	W	31-0
Sept. 30	at Northwestern	W	41-13
Oct. 14	Massachusetts	W	63-0
Oct. 21	at Ohio State	L	12-20
Oct. 28	Indiana	W	33-24
Nov. 4	at Maryland	W	51-15
Nov. 11	Michigan	L	15-24
Nov. 18	Rutgers	W	27-6
Nov. 24	at Michigan State	W	42-0
Dec. 30	vs. Ole Miss #	L	25-38

#Peach Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Cooper Cousins, OL	★★★★★
2.	Jon Mitchell, CB	★★★★
3.	Luke Reynolds, TE	★★★★
4.	Garrett Sexton, OT	★★★★
5.	Mylachi Williams, EDGE	★★★★
6.	Ethan Grunkemeyer, QB	★★★★
7.	Liam Andrews, ATH	★★★★
8.	Quinton Martin, ATH	★★★★
9.	Vaboue Toure, S	★★★★
10.	Jaylen Harvey, EDGE	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: James Franklin • Record at School: 88-39 (10 years) • Career Record: 112-54 (13 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Andy Kotelnicki • Defensive Coordinator: Tom Allen • Location: University Park, Pa.
Stadium: Beaver Stadium (106,572)

PURDUE BOILERMAKERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 76 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 18 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 3-6 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Starting quarterback Hudson Card enjoyed a solid debut following his transfer from Texas, ranking third in the Big Ten in passing yards per game (217.0) after hitting 59 percent (215-of-365) of his attempts for 2,387 yards with 15 TDs and eight interceptions in 11 starts. Coaches hope that Year 2 on campus will see Card blossom.

The bellwether back is Devin Mockobee. The former walk-on has rushed for 1,779 yards (4.8 ypc) in two years with 15 TDs. Mockobee also is a deft receiver, hauling in 51 catches for 454 yards and a score. Purdue augmented its backfield by importing Reggie Love III from Illinois.

At wide receiver, there were high hopes in 2023 for Florida Atlantic transfer Jahmal Edrine before he suffered a season-ending knee injury in camp. He could be the No. 1 wideout. Purdue hit the portal again for help, adding three: Georgia's CJ Smith and De'Nylon Morrissette and UCLA's Kam Brown. Smith is a burner. Keep an eye on the tight end duo of Max Klare and George Burhenn, who look poised for big things.

The line is led by two solid anchors in center Gus Hartwig and tackle Marcus Mbow. Depth and size will be better with the arrival of four portal players and two junior college transfers.

DEFENSE The line has a cornerstone in nose tackle Cole Brevard. Just try to move the big fella. It's time for Jeffrey M'Ba to step up next to him.

The rush end spot is a marquee position. Purdue saw pass-rusher deluxe Nic Scourton transfer to Texas A&M. That hurts. Scourton sidekick Kydran Jenkins is back. Last season, he was third in the Big Ten in TFLs (15.5) and No. 3 in sacks (7.5), but he's been moved to linebacker. Big things are expected of Will Heldt, a rising star. Jenkins will anchor at inside linebacker along with Yanni Karlaftis. The position needs some pop.

Safety Dillon Thieneman was everyone's freshman All-American last year. Cornerback has promise. Markevious Brown was a key player after arriving from Ole Miss. Derrick Rogers Jr. has a bright future. Transfers Kyndrich Breedlove (Colorado) and Nyland Green (Georgia) could start.

SPECIALISTS This unit was plagued with inconsistency in 2023. The most pressing need: field-goal kicking, which was tied for the worst in America in 2023 (8-of-17). Maybe incoming freshman Spencer Porath is the answer. Mississippi State transfer Keelan Crimmins, an Aussie, will punt.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Ryan Walters augmented the roster with 14 portal commitments and two juco transfers, as well as a solid recruiting class. The Boilermakers' task is complicated by a daunting schedule that includes Notre Dame, Ohio State, Penn State, Wisconsin and Oregon, making a 6-6 mark the likely best-case scenario.

Hudson Card

SCOUTING THE BOILERMAKERS

"Watch these guys for a defensive breakout. They didn't fully understand the system Ryan [Walters] installed in Year 1. They've brought in some really talented transfers, and a lot of their key guys are back. This is going to be the identity of their team. The freshman safety from last year [Dillon Thieneman] who was All-American, he's their kind of guy. That's their model. ... Hudson [Card] is a solid and experienced quarterback, and he's got another year under his belt in [offensive coordinator Graham] Harrell's system. ... They need to develop the O-line and receivers better, but expect them to improve overall this season."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)				
WR	7	Jahmal Edrine (Jr.)		Leland Smith (So.)
WR	9	CJ Smith (So.)	26	Andrew Sowinski (Sr.)
WR	4	Kam Brown (Sr.)	0	Jayden Dixon-Veal (Sr.)
LT	71	Corey Stewart (Sr.)	74	Joshua Sales Jr. (Jr.)
LG	**77**	**MAHAMANE MOUSSA (JR.)**	79	Joey Tanona (So.)
C	**53**	**GUS HARTWIG (SR.)**	64	Austin Johnson (Sr.)
RG	55	DJ Wingfield (Sr.)	**75**	**JALEN GRANT (SR.)**
RT	**63**	**MARCUS MBOW (JR.)**	78	Bakyne Coly (Jr.)
TE	86	Max Klare (So.)	81	George Burhenn (So.)
QB	1	**HUDSON CARD (SR.)**	15	Ryan Browne (Fr.)
RB	**45**	**DEVIN MOCKOBEE (JR.)**	23	Reggie Love III (Sr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	15	Will Heldt (So.)	17	Shitta Sillah (Sr.)
DT	95	Joe Anderson (Sr.)	55	Jamarius Dinkins (Jr.)
NT	**91**	**COLE BREVARD (SR.)**	92	Mo Omonode (Jr.)
DT	0	Jeffrey M'Ba (Sr.)	34	Damarjhe Lewis (Sr.)
DE	8	CJ Madden (So.)	99	Jireh Ojata (Sr.)
ILB	**4**	**KYDRAN JENKINS (SR.)**	**14**	**YANNI KARLAFTIS (JR.)**
STAR	10	Kyndrich Breedlove (Jr.)	7	Salim Turner-Muhammad (6th)
CB	2	Nyland Green (Jr.)	3	Derrick Rogers Jr. (So.)
CB	1	**MARKEVIOUS BROWN (SR.)**	19	Botros Alisandro (Jr.)
S	**31**	**DILLON THIENEMAN (SO.)**	32	Joseph Jefferson II (So.)
S	11	Antonio Stevens (Sr.)	23	Ethon Cole (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K		Spencer Porath (Fr.)	KR	Koy Beasley (Fr.)
P		Keelan Crimmins (So.)	PR 26	Andrew Sowinski (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Indiana State
Sept. 14	Notre Dame
Sept. 21	at Oregon State
Sept. 28	Nebraska
Oct. 5	at Wisconsin
Oct. 12	at Illinois
Oct. 19	Oregon
Nov. 2	Northwestern
Nov. 9	at Ohio State
Nov. 16	Penn State
Nov. 23	at Michigan St.
Nov. 30	at Indiana

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 3-6 BIG TEN)

Sept. 2	Fresno State	L	35-39
Sept. 9	at Virginia Tech	W	24-17
Sept. 16	Syracuse	L	20-35
Sept. 22	Wisconsin	L	17-38
Sept. 30	Illinois	W	44-19
Oct. 7	at Iowa	L	14-20
Oct. 14	Ohio State	L	7-41
Oct. 28	at Nebraska	L	14-31
Nov. 4	at Michigan	L	13-41
Nov. 11	Minnesota	W	49-30
Nov. 18	at Northwestern	L	15-23
Nov. 25	Indiana	W	35-31

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Koy Beasley, CB	★★★★
2.	Luke Williams, S	★★★★
3.	Jaden Ball, OL	★★★★
4.	Tra'Mar Harris, WR	★★★
5.	Jamari Payne, DL	★★★
6.	Marcos Davila, QB	★★★
7.	D'Mon Marable, S	★★★
8.	Demeco Kennedy, DL	★★★
9.	Earl Kulp, CB	★★★
10.	Shamar Rigby, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ryan Walters • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 4-8 (1 year)
Offensive Coordinator: Graham Harrell • Defensive Coordinator: Kevin Kane • Location: West Lafayette, Ind.
Stadium: Ross-Ade Stadium (61,441)

Robert Goddin-USA TODAY Sports

Kyle Monangai

SCOUTING THE SCARLET KNIGHTS

"They turned the corner last season, and for the first time since [Greg] Schiano came back, they're going to have the depth you need to be competitive in the league. ... They finished in a spot where they were obviously less talented than the teams they lost to, and they were as good as or better than the rosters they beat. The next phase is elevating in recruiting and pulling that bigger conference win. ... The quarterback [Gavin Wimsatt] is back, they have a really nice stable of running backs and some decent guys have developed at receiver. I would say they're on track to move up a little bit and maybe catch someone by surprise, but they're still building and still significantly behind the elite of the league."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	0	Dymere Miller (Sr.)	3	Chris Long (Sr.)
WR	28	Naseim Brantley (Sr.)	9	Ian Strong (So.)
WR	6	**CHRISTIAN DREMEL (SR.)**	7	Dylan Braithwaite (So.)
LT	72	**HOLLIN PIERCE (SR.)**	63	Taj White (Jr.)
LG	65	**BRYAN FELTER (SR.)**	76	Dantae Chin (Jr.)
C	59	**GUS ZILINSKAS (SR.)**	71	John Stone (So.)
RG	69	Kwabena Asamoah (Jr.)	70	**REGGIE SUTTON (SR.)**
RT	56	Tyler Needham (Sr.)	74	Dominic Rivera (So.)
TE	12	Kenny Fletcher (Jr.)	89	Victor Konopka (Sr.)
QB	16	Athan Kaliakmanis (Sr.)	15	Ajani Sheppard (Fr.)
RB	5	**KYLE MONANGAI (SR.)**	27	Samuel Brown V (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	71	**AARON LEWIS (SR.)**	90	Rene Konga (Sr.)
DT	9	Malcolm Ray (Sr.)	55	Zaire Angoy (Sr.)
DT	48	Kyonte Hamilton (Sr.)	51	Troy Rainey (Sr.)
DE	23	**WESLEY BAILEY (SR.)**	14	Jordan Thompson (Sr.)
LB	1	**MOHAMED TOURE (SR.)**	2	Moses Walker (Jr.)
LB	22	**TYREEM POWELL (SR.)**	11	Abram Wright (So.)
STAR	6	**SHAQUAN LOYAL (SR.)**	37	Joe Lusardi (Sr.)
CB	7	**ROBERT LONGERBEAM (SR.)**	3	Bo Mascoe (So.)
CB	0	Eric Rogers (Sr.)	21	Al-Shadee Salaam (Sr.)
S	10	Michael "Flip" Dixon (Sr.)	5	Kaj Sanders (Fr.)
S	4	Desmond Igbinosun (Sr.)	27	Sage Clawges (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	44	Jai Patel (Jr.)	KR	6 Christian Dremel (Sr.)
P	98	Michael Hartshorn (So.)	PR	6 Christian Dremel (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Vincent Carchietta-USA TODAY Sports

RUTGERS SCARLET KNIGHTS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 41 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 9 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 3-6 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Rutgers went run-heavy in Kirk Ciarrocca's first year back as offensive coordinator, carrying the ball on 61.9 percent of its offensive plays (eighth nationally). The Scarlet Knights rode running back Kyle Monangai, who led the Big Ten in rushing and became the first 1,000-yard rusher for the program in 11 years, while starting quarterback Gavin Wimsatt did just enough to help the Scarlet Knights reach (and win) their first bowl game in nine years.

A similar playbook projects to play out this fall, but there could be different players executing it. Wimsatt has transferred and will be replaced by Minnesota transfer Athan Kaliakmanis, with the goal being improved play at the position. Along with three starters on the offensive line, Monangai is back and expected to carry the load once again, but an upgraded wide receiving corps — which returns starter Christian Dremel and adds FCS transfers Dymere Miller (Monmouth) and Naseim Brantley (Western Illinois) plus a handful of second-year players with breakout potential — should help.

DEFENSE Coordinator Joe Harasymiak's unit, which ranked in the top 50 nationally in total (16th), scoring (32nd), rushing (41st) and passing (10th) defense, helped lead Rutgers to its most successful season in a decade. With six senior starters and multiple key contributors returning, the unit has a chance to become one of the best defenses in the Big Ten.

One of the few question marks comes at cornerback, where standout Max Melton heads to the NFL. Veteran Robert Longerbeam will step up to the top spot at the position, while Eric Rogers and Bo Mascoe will fight for the second starting spot.

At defensive tackle, a position that lost Mayan Ahanotu to graduation, Rutgers hopes Florida State product Malcolm Ray could be the latest in a line of transfers who have thrived at the position.

SPECIALISTS Rutgers lost its starting long snapper and punter to retirement, but BYU transfer Austin Riggs should be an upgrade at the former position, and the Scarlet Knights have already identified a replacement at the latter. Starting kicker Jai Patel, who is coming off the most accurate field-goal kicking season in program history (15-for-18), returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Rutgers brings back a majority of the key players from its breakout season last fall, has replaced the few that have departed and projects to upgrade at its weakest position (quarterback). The Scarlet Knights seem set to have another big year and take another step forward as head coach Greg Schiano's second stint rolls on.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Howard
Sept. 7	Akron
Sept. 21	at Virginia Tech
Sept. 28	Washington
Oct. 5	at Nebraska
Oct. 12	Wisconsin
Oct. 19	UCLA
Oct. 26	at USC
Nov. 9	Minnesota
Nov. 16	at Maryland
Nov. 23	Illinois
Nov. 30	at Michigan St.

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 3-6 BIG TEN)

Sept. 3	Northwestern	W	24-7
Sept. 9	Temple	W	36-7
Sept. 16	Virginia Tech	W	35-16
Sept. 23	at Michigan	L	7-31
Sept. 30	Wagner	W	52-3
Oct. 7	at Wisconsin	L	13-24
Oct. 14	Michigan State	W	27-24
Oct. 21	at Indiana	W	31-14
Nov. 4	Ohio State	L	16-35
Nov. 11	at Iowa	L	0-22
Nov. 18	at Penn State	L	6-27
Nov. 25	Maryland	L	24-42
Dec. 28	vs. Miami #	W	31-24

#Pinstripe Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	KJ Duff, TE	★★★★
2.	Kevin Levy, CB	★★★★
3.	AJ Surace, QB	★★★★
4.	Antonio White, S	★★★★
5.	Kaj Sanders, S	★★★
6.	Sam Robinson, LB	★★★
7.	Matthew Ogunniyi, TE	★★★
8.	Isaiah Crumpler, ATH	★★★
9.	Farrell Gnago, EDGE	★★★
10.	Gabriel Winowich, ATH	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Greg Schiano • Record at School: 87-95 (15 years) • Career Record: 87-95 (15 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Kirk Ciarocca • Defensive Coordinator: Joe Harasymiak • Location: Piscataway, N.J.
Stadium: SHI Stadium (52,454)

UCLA BRUINS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 59 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 14 | 2023 RECORD: 8-5, 4-5 PAC-12

OFFENSE The upcoming season was always going to be a shock to the system at UCLA with the move to the Big Ten, but things were complicated further in mid-February when head coach Chip Kelly left to be offensive coordinator at new conference rival Ohio State. The move cost the Bruins their primary play-caller and the coach most responsible for their identity.

It didn't take long for the school to turn to beloved alum DeShaun Foster. The former All-America tailback had spent a decade around the program as an assistant and played a big role in UCLA leading the Pac-12 in rushing yards the past two seasons. Such a run-first approach is likely to continue as the team transitions into the Big Ten, but Foster is hoping the arrival of new offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy can bring enough NFL passing concepts to make the team equally proficient through the air. Bieniemy's primary task will be to mentor incumbent quarterback Ethan Garbers (1,136 passing yards, 11 touchdowns in 2023) and help him limit mistakes while pushing the ball downfield more frequently.

There's some quality skill-position talent on the roster — highlighted by wide receiver J.Michael Sturdivant — and a solid core up front.

DEFENSE As tough as it was to lose Kelly, the bigger blow to UCLA this offseason may have been defensive coordinator D'Anton Lynn's move across town to USC. Lynn led a remarkable turnaround in 2023, turning a middling group into one of the best defenses on the West Coast.

Ikaika Malloe was promoted from DL coach to coordinator. While the system will mostly remain in place, the new staff will have to deal with the loss of key contributors like All-American Laiatu Latu, star linebacker Darius Muasau and the bulk of the secondary. The return of linebacker Kain Medrano and cornerback Devin Kirkwood helps, but there are likely to be more questions than answers until conference play begins.

SPECIALISTS Cal transfer Mateen Bhaghani figures to handle placekicking duties after going 8-of-9 on field goals last season while redshirt freshman Chase Barry is in line to punt. Top return men Logan Loya and Keegan Jones both return with plenty of experience and should solidify things under new special teams coach Kodi Whitfield.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's firmly a new era for UCLA with the move to the Big Ten and new man in charge. There's bound to be plenty of learning on the job for a first-time head coach in a new league, but the Bruins hope to count on an improved offense to keep them afloat amid the transition. A brutal schedule and a suspect defense, however, may limit the team from doing anything beyond reaching a bowl game.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Hawaii
Sept. 14	Indiana
Sept. 21	at LSU
Sept. 28	Oregon
Oct. 5	at Penn State
Oct. 12	Minnesota
Oct. 19	at Rutgers
Nov. 2	at Nebraska
Nov. 9	Iowa
Nov. 16	at Washington
Nov. 23	USC
Nov. 30	Fresno State

2023 RESULTS (8-5, 4-5 PAC-12)

Sept. 2	Coastal Carolina	W	27-13
Sept. 9	at San Diego State	W	35-10
Sept. 16	N. Carolina Central	W	59-7
Sept. 23	at Utah	L	7-14
Oct. 7	Washington State	W	25-17
Oct. 14	at Oregon State	L	24-36
Oct. 21	at Stanford	W	42-7
Oct. 28	Colorado	W	28-16
Nov. 4	at Arizona	L	10-27
Nov. 11	Arizona State	L	7-17
Nov. 18	at USC	W	38-20
Nov. 25	California	L	7-33
Dec. 16	vs. Boise State #	W	35-22

#LA Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kwazi Gilmer, WR	★★★★
2.	Mark Schroller, OT	★★★★
3.	Jamir Benjamin, CB	★★★
4.	Marquise Thorpe-Taylor, OL	★★★
5.	Jensen Somerville, OT	★★★
6.	Cameron Jones, RB	★★★
7.	Isaiah Petterson, LB	★★★
8.	Henry Hasselbeck, QB	★★★
9.	Khristian Dunbar-Hawkins, S	★★★
10.	Karson Gordon, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: DeShaun Foster • Record at School: First season • Career Record: First season
Offensive Coordinator: Eric Bieniemy • Defensive Coordinator: Ikaika Malloe • Location: Los Angeles, Calif.
Stadium: Rose Bowl Stadium (89,702)

T.J. Harden

SCOUTING THE BRUINS

"They're going to be really interesting to watch in the next few seasons. I think that Chip [Kelly] lost his taste for the head coach position and what it takes these days, from the executive side of it to the new rules and the portal. [DeShaun] Foster wants to be there and wants to lean into the energy of the city, for sure. ... [Offensive coordinator Eric] Bieniemy back in college will be interesting to watch. ... It's too early to tell what that roster will do this season, but they're trying to fire up the brand and get the alumni and boosters into NIL and get the energy up. It's been a really quiet and forgettable program for a long time in recruiting."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	1	**J.MICHAEL STURDIVANT (JR.)**	15	Braden Pegan (Fr.)
WR	17	**LOGAN LOYA (SR.)**	2	Titus Mokiao-Atimalala (Sr.)
WR		Rico Flores (So.)		Kwazi Gilmer (Fr.)
LT		Reuben Unije (Sr.)		Michael Carmody (Sr.)
LG	74	**SPENCER HOLSTEGE (SR.)**	68	Noah Pulealii (Jr.)
C	52	Benjamin Roy Jr. (Jr.)	64	Sam Yoon (So.)
RG	54	**JOSH CARLIN (SR.)**	70	Caleb Walker (So.)
RT	72	**GARRETT DIGIORGIO (JR.)**	56	Tavake Tuikolovatu (Fr.)
TE		Moliki Matavao (Jr.)	82	Sam Summa (So.)
QB	4	Ethan Garbers (Sr.)	6	Justyn Martin (So.)
RB	25	T.J. Harden (Jr.)	22	Keegan Jones (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	41	Devin Aupiu (Sr.)		Collins Acheampong (Fr.)
DT	99	**KEANU WILLIAMS (JR.)**	59	Siale Taupaki (Sr.)
DT	93	**JAY TOIA (JR.)**	95	Steven Havili-Kaufusi (Sr.)
EDGE		Jacob Busic (Sr.)		Luke Schuermann (Sr.)
LB	20	**KAIN MEDRANO (SR.)**	1	Ale Kaho (Sr.)
LB	2	Oluwafemi Oladejo (Sr.)	21	JonJon Vaughns (Sr.)
CB	24	**JAYLIN DAVIES (JR.)**	18	Jadyn Marshall (So.)
CB	3	Devin Kirkwood (Sr.)	35	Kanye Clark (Fr.)
NB		K.J. Wallace (Sr.)	19	D.J. Justice (Jr.)
SS		Ramon Henderson (Sr.)	14	Clint Stephens (So.)
FS		Bryan Addison (Sr.)		Croix Stewart (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K		Mateen Bhaghani (So.)	KR 22	Keegan Jones (Sr.)
P	45	Chase Barry (So.)	PR 17	Logan Loya (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Orlando Ramirez-USA TODAY Sports

Zachariah Branch

SCOUTING THE TROJANS

"Lincoln [Riley] screwed up and held on to a bad situation with his DC a season too long, but hiring [D'Anton] Lynn from across town was a smart move. Kind of a can't beat him, hire him situation. ... Expect improvement schematically overall with the new system, and they've upgraded in the secondary. They'll be better than under [Alex] Grinch. ... Obviously they're replacing Caleb [Williams], but the bigger question is if they can get both lines playing better. They can ease the new QB in if they're protecting him, and if they're getting push on the defensive side. They didn't look anything like the old USC glory teams in the trenches the last few years."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	1	**ZACHARIAH BRANCH (SO.)**	19	Xavier Jordan (Fr.)
WR	10	Kyron Judson (Jr.)	15	Jaden Richardson (Sr.)
WR	2	Duce Robinson (So.)	8	Ja'Kobi Lane (So.)
LT	72	Elijah Paige (Fr.)	62	Cooper Lovelace (Sr.)
LG	70	**EMMANUEL PREGNON (SR.)**	77	Alani Noa (So.)
C	79	**JONAH MONHEIM (SR.)**	67	Kilian O'Connor (Jr.)
RG	66	Gino Quinones (Sr.)	75	Amos Talalele (Fr.)
RT	76	Mason Murphy (Jr.)	73	Tobias Raymond (Fr.)
TE	87	Lake McRee (Jr.)		Walker Lyons (Fr.)
QB	7	Miller Moss (Jr.)	14	Jayden Maiava (So.)
RB	4	Woody Marks (Sr.)	0	Quinten Joyner (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	99	Nate Clifton (Sr.)	6	Anthony Lucas (Jr.)
NT	90	**BEAR ALEXANDER (JR.)**	94	Kobe Pepe (Sr.)
DT	34	Braylan Shelby (So.)	56	Elijah Hughes (So.)
RUSH	10	**JAMIL MUHAMMAD (SR.)**	58	Solomon Tuliaupupu (Sr.)
LB	18	Eric Gentry (Sr.)	9	Raesjon Davis (Sr.)
LB	13	**MASON COBB (SR.)**	4	Easton Mascarenas-Arnold (Sr.)
CB	1	**JAYLIN SMITH (SR.)**	17	DeCarlos Nicholson (Sr.)
CB	19	John Humphrey (Sr.)	14	Jacobe Covington (Sr.)
NB	15	Anthony Beavers Jr. (Jr.)	25	Marcelles Williams (Fr.)
SS	0	Akili Arnold (Sr.)	8	Zion Branch (So.)
FS	7	Kamari Ramsey (So.)	27	Bryson Shaw (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	46	Denis Lynch (Jr.)	KR	1 Zachariah Branch (So.)
P	16	Eddie Czaplicki (Sr.)	PR	1 Zachariah Branch (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Kirby Lee-USA TODAY Sports

USC TROJANS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 22 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 5 | 2023 RECORD: 8-5, 5-4 PAC-12

OFFENSE Fielding a productive offense has never been a problem for Lincoln Riley. The Air Raid savant has produced a top-eight scoring offense in all seven of his seasons as a head coach and has the rare distinction of being the only head coach to tutor three Heisman Trophy-winning quarterbacks, the most recent being No. 1 overall pick Caleb Williams.

Still, losing a dazzling dual-threat signal-caller like Williams combined with the move to the Big Ten has introduced an element of skepticism. Not only will the Trojans be transitioning into a more defensive-minded league, but they'll also be relying on a host of new offensive starters across the board who are either underclassmen or inexperienced (or both).

Redshirt junior Miller Moss is the presumed successor behind center after an incredible first start in the Holiday Bowl, where he threw for 372 yards and six touchdowns. Jayden Maiava is waiting in the wings after spurning Georgia and arriving via the transfer portal from UNLV. The redshirt sophomore brings an added dimension with his legs and posted 3,085 passing yards and 20 total TDs in his first year as a starter.

Mississippi State transfer Woody Marks has a chance to be a breakout star in the backfield. He started 32 times in the SEC and is among the best all-around tailbacks in the country. He'll be running behind an offensive line that will be under the microscope in the physical Big Ten.

DEFENSE The USC defense is undergoing a radical makeover highlighted by new coordinator D'Anton Lynn, who arrived from UCLA after taking the Bruins from 87th in total defense to 11th in just one year. Riley also lured FCS North Dakota State head coach Matt Entz to serve as linebackers coach; Super Bowl-winner Eric Henderson is the new line coach; and former Houston DC Doug Belk will revamp the secondary.

There remain questions about depth and overall talent level. DT Bear Alexander, LB Eric Gentry and DB Akili Arnold are players to build around at all three levels, but it may not be until deep into the conference schedule that meaningful progress is made elsewhere.

SPECIALISTS USC returns a veteran kicker and punter, but the real threat on special teams remains sophomore Zachariah Branch. The All-American might be the most electric player in the sport with the ball in his hands. He scored via both punt and kickoff returns last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS There's enough talent and coaching acumen for USC to be a fringe College Football Playoff contender in an expanded 12-team field, but the general unknown at quarterback combined with a transition to the Big Ten could make for an uneven 2024 campaign.

2024 SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	vs. LSU #
Sept. 7	Utah State
Sept. 21	at Michigan
Sept. 28	Wisconsin
Oct. 5	at Minnesota
Oct. 12	Penn State
Oct. 19	at Maryland
Oct. 26	Rutgers
Nov. 2	at Washington
Nov. 16	Nebraska
Nov. 23	at UCLA
Nov. 30	Notre Dame

#Las Vegas, NV

2023 RESULTS (8-5, 5-4 PAC-12)

Aug. 26	San José State	W	56-28
Sept. 2	Nevada	W	66-14
Sept. 9	Stanford	W	56-10
Sept. 23	at Arizona State	W	42-28
Sept. 30	at Colorado	W	48-41
Oct. 7	Arizona (ot)	W	43-41
Oct. 14	at Notre Dame	L	20-48
Oct. 21	Utah	L	32-34
Oct. 28	at California	W	50-49
Nov. 4	Washington	L	42-52
Nov. 11	at Oregon	L	27-36
Nov. 18	UCLA	L	20-38
Dec. 27	vs. Louisville #	W	42-28

#Holiday Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Elijah Newby, LB	★★★★
2.	Kameryn Fountain, EDGE	★★★★
3.	Jide Abasiri, DL	★★★★
4.	Xavier Jordan, WR	★★★★
5.	Walter Matthews, TE	★★★★
6.	Jason Zadamela, OL	★★★★
7.	Marcelles Williams, CB	★★★★
8.	Carlon Jones, DL	★★★★
9.	Joey Olsen, TE	★★★★
10.	Desman Stephens, LB	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Lincoln Riley • Record at School: 19-8 (2 years) • Career Record: 74-18 (6 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Josh Henson • Defensive Coordinator: D'Anton Lynn • Location: Los Angeles, Calif.
Stadium: LA Memorial Coliseum (77,500)

WASHINGTON HUSKIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 42 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 10 | 2023 RECORD: 14-1, 9-0 PAC-12

OFFENSE New head coach Jedd Fisch and his staff have a lot of work to do to rebuild one of the nation's top offenses after quarterback Michael Penix Jr., wideout Rome Odunze, the Joe Moore Award-winning offensive line and every other starter departed for either the NFL Draft or the transfer portal. The staff did retain three key transfers: Mississippi State quarterback Will Rogers, who is among college football's all-time leading passers; wide-out Jeremiah Hunter, Cal's top receiver for the last two seasons; and rising star tackle Drew Azzopardi, who came to UW from San Diego State.

All three should make a big impact in 2024 as Washington moves to the Big Ten, as will running back Jonah Coleman, who transferred from Arizona, and sophomore wide receiver Denzel Boston. The Huskies are also regaining the services of running back Cameron Davis, who missed all of last season with a knee injury, making the offensive line far and away the biggest question mark.

DEFENSE Senior linebackers Carson Bruener and Alphonzo Tuputala, senior safety Kamren Fabiculanan and junior cornerback Elijah Jackson return to give the Huskies some defensive continuity. The coaching staff also brought in cornerback Ephesians Prysock, who earned All-Pac-12 honorable mention honors at Arizona in 2023, to boost a secondary that should see a big step forward after the hiring of former New England Patriots outside linebackers coach Steve Belichick to run the defense.

Washington's pass rush also needs retooling after losing all four starters along the defensive line to the NFL Draft. Before departing for Alabama, Kalen DeBoer's coaching staff was very high on edge rusher Zach Durfee, a transfer from Division II Sioux Falls.

Durfee joins Arizona transfers Russell Davis II and Isaiah Ward and returnees Lance Holtzclaw and senior Voi Tunuufi to provide a formidable rotation of edge rushers. At tackle, FCS Montana State transfer Sebastian Valdez recorded 10.5 sacks over his last two years and will look to wreak havoc. Defensive line coach Jason Kaufusi will ask twins Armon and Jayvon Parker to become a bigger part of the rotation in the middle.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Grady Gross and punter Jack McCallister both return to Montlake, creating a solid unit, although the Huskies will be looking for a new long snapper after Jaden Green departed for the NFL.

FINAL ANALYSIS Although inexperienced, the Huskies have a talented team. Fisch's coaching staff did an excellent job scheming to find success at Arizona, so if the Huskies were to win eight or nine games despite the offseason's huge talent exodus, it wouldn't come as a surprise.

2023 RESULTS (14-1, 9-0 PAC-12)

Sept. 2	Boise State	W	56-19
Sept. 9	Tulsa	W	43-10
Sept. 16	at Michigan State	W	41-7
Sept. 23	California	W	59-32
Sept. 30	at Arizona	W	31-24
Oct. 14	Oregon	W	36-33
Oct. 21	Arizona State	W	15-7
Oct. 28	at Stanford	W	42-33
Nov. 4	at USC	W	52-42
Nov. 11	Utah	W	35-28
Nov. 18	at Oregon State	W	22-20
Nov. 25	Washington State	W	24-21
Dec. 1	vs. Oregon #	W	34-31
Jan. 1	vs. Texas %	W	37-31
Jan. 8	vs. Michigan &	L	13-34

#Las Vegas %Sugar Bowl: CFB Playoff Semifinal &Houston: CFB Playoff National Championship

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Weber State
Sept. 7	Eastern Michigan
Sept. 14	Washington St. #
Sept. 21	Northwestern
Sept. 28	at Rutgers
Oct. 5	Michigan
Oct. 12	at Iowa
Oct. 26	at Indiana
Nov. 2	USC
Nov. 9	at Penn State
Nov. 16	UCLA
Nov. 30	at Oregon

#Lumen Field

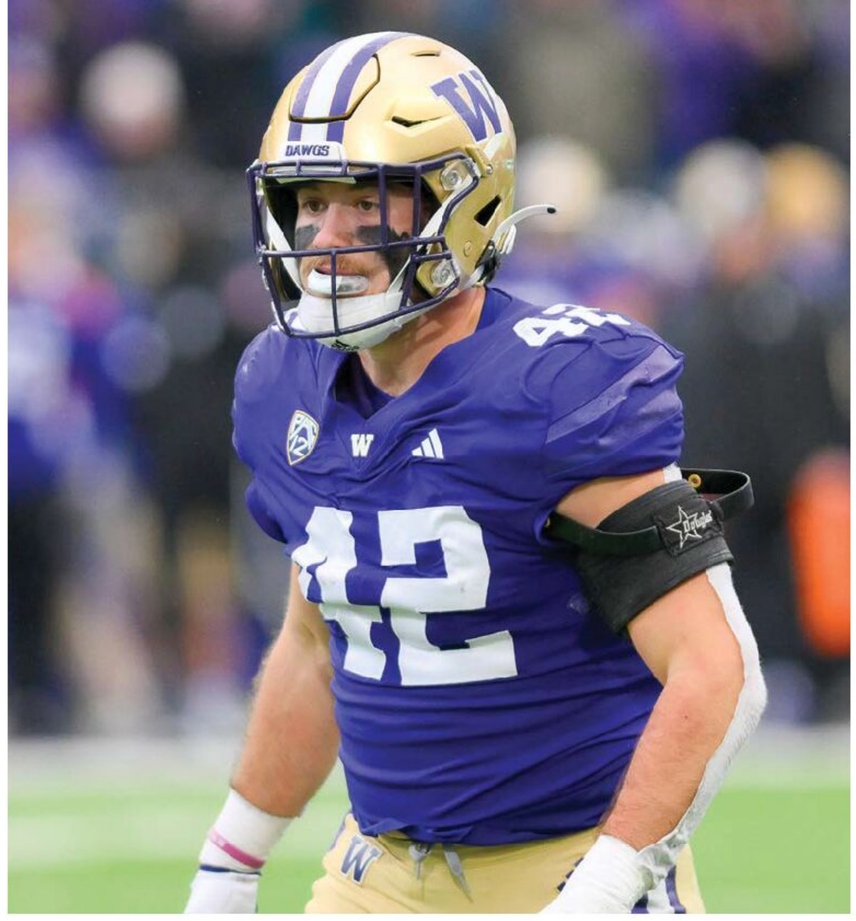
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dermaricus Davis, QB	★★★★
2.	Peyton Waters, S	★★★★
3.	Justice Williams, WR	★★★★
4.	Paul Mencke Jr., S	★★★★
5.	Demond Williams Jr., QB	★★★★
6.	Paki Finau, OL	★★★★
7.	Decker DeGraaf, TE	★★★
8.	Jason Robinson, WR	★★★
9.	Rahim Wright, S	★★★
10.	Elias Johnson, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jedd Fisch • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 16-21 (3+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Brennan Carroll Defensive Coordinator: Steve Belichick • Location: Seattle, Wash. Stadium: Husky Stadium (70,138)



Carson Bruener

SCOUTING THE HUSKIES

"Obviously, they're going to be a completely different program entering the Big Ten in every way you can imagine. Nothing about last season is going to carry over, except maybe the expectations after what Kalen [DeBoer] put together... [Jedd Fisch's] work at Arizona compares a lot to what he's got to deal with this year. He's got a young, new staff at a lot of key positions and a roster with no direction and identity. They'll probably take it on the chin this season because of their schedule, but Jedd knows how to build a long-term recruiting plan, and clearly Washington supports NIL and the portal. They're not going to make the playoff this year or next year, but he's a really smart pick for a rebuild."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (0)

WR	6	Jeremiah Hunter (Sr.)	3	Rashid Williams (Fr.)
WR	5	Giles Jackson (Sr.)	15	Keith Reynolds (Fr.)
WR	12	Denzel Boston (So.)		Justice Williams (Fr.)
LT	74	Drew Azzopardi (So.)	68	Sione Faasolo (Fr.)
LG	64	Gaard Memmelaar (Jr.)	53	Paki Finau (Fr.)
C	66	Landen Hatchett (So.)	58	Zachary Henning (Fr.)
RG	58	Zachary Henning (Fr.)	55	Michael Watkins (Fr.)
RT	76	Elishah Jackett (Fr.)	71	Kahlee Tafai (Fr.)
TE	88	Quentin Moore (Sr.)	86	Decker DeGraaf (Fr.)
QB	7	Will Rogers (Sr.)	2	Demond Williams Jr. (Fr.)
RB	1	Jonah Coleman (Jr.)	22	Cameron Davis (Sr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	15	Zach Durfee (Sr.)	91	Isaiah Ward (So.)
DT	50	Sebastian Valdez (Sr.)	55	Jacob Bandes (Sr.)
DT	94	Jayvon Parker (Jr.)	95	Armon Parker (So.)
DE	45	Maurice Heims (Jr.)	41	Lance Holtzclaw (So.)
LB	42	Carson Bruener (Sr.)	5	Bryun Parham (Sr.)
LB	11	**ALPHONZO TUPUTALA (SR.)**	33	Jordan Whitney (Fr.)
CB	7	Ephesians Prysock (Jr.)	16	Curley Reed III (Fr.)
CB	25	**ELIJAH JACKSON (JR.)**	9	Thaddeus Dixon (Sr.)
NB	6	Davon Banks (Jr.)	3	Jordan Shaw (Fr.)
S	13	Kamren Fabiculanan (Sr.)	12	Tristan Dunn (So.)
S	24	Makell Esteen (Jr.)	22	Peyton Waters (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	95	Grady Gross (Jr.)	KR	21	Daniyel Ngata (Sr.)
P	38	Jack McCallister (Jr.)	PR	21	Daniyel Ngata (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Steven Bisig-USA TODAY Sports

Chez Mellusi

SCOUTING THE BADGERS

"The focus here is on offense. It was a hard sell for a program like this to embrace a system like Phil's [offensive coordinator Phil Longo], and it ended up being a mismatch because of personnel. Are they going to make any big changes? I think there's extra pressure here in Year 2 because they didn't score points last season, and they got away from an identity that worked so well in this league. ... Defensively, we expect them to be much improved. I'd say they're on a timeline similar to what Luke [Fickell] did at Cincinnati. That's not the side of the ball to worry about here. They need to put up points to get everyone on board with their new identity — it's that simple."

— An opposing Big Ten assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	9	**BRYSON GREEN (SR.)**	5	Quincy Burroughs (So.)
WR	86	Vinny Anthony II (Jr.)	14	Tyrell Henry (Jr.)
WR	6	**WILL PAULING (JR.)**	12	Trech Kekahuna (Fr.)
LT	79	**JACK NELSON (SR.)**	70	Barrett Nelson (So.)
LG	56	Joe Brunner (So.)	65	James Durand (Fr.)
C	57	Jake Renfro (Sr.)		Ryan Cory (Fr.)
RG	60	**JOE HUBER (SR.)**	67	JP Benzschawel (Jr.)
RT	71	**RILEY MAHLMAN (JR.)**	55	Kevin Heywood (Fr.)
TE	38	Tucker Ashcraft (So.)	41	JT Seagreaves (So.)
QB	10	Tyler Van Dyke (Sr.)	18	Braedyn Locke (So.)
RB	1	Chez Mellusi (Sr.)	3	Tawee Walker (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DT	92	Curt Neal (So.)	91	Jamel Howard Jr. (Fr.)
DE	90	**JAMES THOMPSON JR. (SR.)**	68	Ben Barten (Sr.)
JACK	0	John Pius (Sr.)	59	Aaron Witt (Sr.)
SLB	8	Leon Lowery (Sr.)	**17**	**DARRYL PETERSON (JR.)**
MLB	4	Tackett Curtis (So.)	**36**	**JAKE CHANEY (SR.)**
WLB	7	Jaheim Thomas (Sr.)	28	Christian Alliegro (So.)
CB	5	RJ Delancy (Sr.)	10	Nyzier Fourqurean (Sr.)
CB	2	**RICARDO HALLMAN (JR.)**	21	Jonas Duclona (So.)
NB	9	Austin Brown (Jr.)	12	Max Lofy (Sr.)
SS	24	**HUNTER WOHLER (SR.)**	14	Preston Zachman (Sr.)
FS	13	Kamo'i Latu (Sr.)	20	Braedyn Moore (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	90	Nathanial Vakos (Jr.)	KR	86 Vinny Anthony II (Jr.)
P	49	Atticus Bertrams (So.)	PR	86 Vinny Anthony II (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Jeff Hanisch-USA TODAY Sports

WISCONSIN BADGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 34 | BIG TEN PREDICTION: 8 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 5-4 BIG TEN

OFFENSE Wisconsin's move to an Air Raid offense failed to get off the ground last fall, but the belief is that a year in the system will result in more confidence and better execution. The Badgers will have a legitimate quarterback battle between Miami (Fla.) transfer Tyler Van Dyke and Braedyn Locke, last season's backup who started three games. Van Dyke has the physical traits (6-4, 227) that head coach Luke Fickell prefers, but Locke's mental mastery of the system could give him an edge.

Wisconsin will try to replace NFL-bound running back Braelon Allen in the aggregate. Injury-plagued sixth-year senior Chez Mellusi (6.0 yards per carry in 2023) will lead the way, but Oklahoma transfer Tawee Walker and a handful of others have to add other dimensions to the rushing attack.

Receiver Will Pauling (837 yards, six TDs) earned second-team All-Big Ten honors. He'll have more help this year, with Trech Kekahuna breaking out in the ReliaQuest Bowl and Bryson Green healthy again.

There's optimism that the line, which features three returning starters, can be better in pass protection after allowing 23 sacks and 109 pressures.

DEFENSE Fickell and defensive coordinator Mike Tressel have revamped the Badgers' linebacking corps via the transfer portal, aiming to be better against the pass and increase the athleticism of the defense as a whole. Transfers Leon Lowery (Syracuse) and FCS All-American John Pius (William & Mary) will be crucial to an improved pass rush.

Defensive line is a concern. James Thompson Jr. had his most productive season in 2023 with 29 tackles and three sacks, but the rest of the returning defensive linemen totaled only 2.5 tackles for a loss.

Wisconsin should be deeper in the secondary, and with All-Big Ten performers in safety Hunter Wohler and cornerback Ricardo Hallman returning, it has experience to take on a daunting schedule.

SPECIALISTS Wisconsin will have both its starting specialists back in punter Atticus Bertrams (41.3 yards per punt) and kicker Nathanial Vakos (15-of-19 on field goals, all four misses from 40-plus yards). Bertrams, a native of Australia, appears more consistent than a year ago.

FINAL ANALYSIS If the Badgers struggle to score against the bottom half of the Big Ten again, there will be calls to pull the plug on the Air Raid experiment. Wisconsin isn't deep on the lines but should be able to rotate a good number of players on defense and be impactful with Tressel's creative blitz packages. However, with a schedule that features Alabama in September and Big Ten roadblocks like Iowa, Penn State, Oregon and USC, it's difficult to imagine a great season.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Western Michigan
Sept. 7	South Dakota
Sept. 14	Alabama
Sept. 28	at USC
Oct. 5	Purdue
Oct. 12	at Rutgers
Oct. 19	at Northwestern
Oct. 26	Penn State
Nov. 2	at Iowa
Nov. 16	Oregon
Nov. 23	at Nebraska
Nov. 30	Minnesota

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 5-4 BIG TEN)

Sept. 2	Buffalo	W	38-17
Sept. 9	at Washington State	L	22-31
Sept. 16	Georgia Southern	W	35-14
Sept. 22	at Purdue	W	38-17
Oct. 7	Rutgers	W	24-13
Oct. 14	Iowa	L	6-15
Oct. 21	at Illinois	W	25-21
Oct. 28	Ohio State	L	10-24
Nov. 4	at Indiana	L	14-20
Nov. 11	Northwestern	L	10-24
Nov. 18	Nebraska (ot)	W	24-17
Nov. 25	at Minnesota	W	28-14
Jan. 1	vs. LSU #	L	31-35

#ReliaQuest Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kevin Heywood, OT	★★★★
2.	Emerson Mandell, OL	★★★★
3.	Dilin Jones, RB	★★★★
4.	Xavier Lucas, S	★★★★
5.	Thomas Heiberger, LB	★★★★
6.	Ernest Willor, DL	★★★
7.	Grant Stec, TE	★★★
8.	Colin Cubberly, OT	★★★
9.	Rob Booker, TE	★★★
10.	Dillan Johnson, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Luke Fickell • Record at School: 8-6 (1+ years) • Career Record: 71-31 (8+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Phil Longo • Defensive Coordinator: Mike Tressel • Location: Madison, Wis.
Stadium: Camp Randall Stadium (80,321)

C-USA PREVIEW

Quinton Cooley, Liberty

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. **LIBERTY** FLAMES
2. **WKU** HILLTOPPERS
3. **JACKSONVILLE STATE** GAMECOCKS
4. **FIU** PANTHERS
5. **SAM HOUSTON** BEARKATS
6. **MIDDLE TENNESSEE** BLUE RAIDERS
7. **LOUISIANA TECH** BULLDOGS
8. **NEW MEXICO STATE** AGGIES
9. **UTEP** MINERS
10. **KENNESAW STATE** OWLS

CUSA CHAMPIONSHIP

LIBERTY OVER WKU

ALL-CUSA TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	**Kaidon Salter**	Liberty
RB	**Quinton Cooley**	Liberty
RB	**Monte Watkins**	New Mexico State
AP	**Marquis Crosby**	Louisiana Tech
WR	**Noah Smith**	Sam Houston
WR	**Treon Sibley**	Liberty
WR	**Michael Mathison**	WKU
TE	**Holden Willis**	Middle Tennessee
C	**Jordan White**	Liberty
OL	**Canaan Yarro**	New Mexico State
OL	**Clay Webb**	Jacksonville State
OL	**Shiyazh Pete**	New Mexico State
OL	**Quantavious Leslie**	WKU

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	**Maurice Westmoreland**	UTEP
DL	**Jay Hardy**	Liberty
DL	**Hosea Wheeler**	WKU
DL	**CJ Bazile Jr.**	Liberty
LB	**Issiah Nixon**	Sam Houston
LB	**J-Rock Swain**	Jacksonville State
LB	**Kavian Gaither**	Sam Houston
LB	**Reggie Peterson**	FIU
CB	**Upton Stout**	WKU
CB	**Anthony Johnson**	WKU
S	**Brylan Green**	Liberty
S	**Fred Perry**	Jacksonville State

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	**Colby Sessums**	Sam Houston
P	**Jack Dawson**	Jacksonville State
KR	**Easton Messer**	WKU
PR	**Dean Patterson**	FIU

AS For a look at second- and third-team selections, visit *AthlonSports.com*

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Bahamas: FIU vs. Eastern Michigan

Hawaii: Jacksonville State vs. Fresno State

New Orleans: WKU vs. Louisiana

CFP First Round: Liberty vs. Oregon

Brian Bishop-USA TODAY Sports

GAMES TO WATCH

AUG. 31 Coastal Carolina at Jacksonville State

SEPT. 14 WKU at Middle Tennessee

SEPT. 28 Liberty at Appalachian State

SEPT. 28 Texas State at Sam Houston

SEPT. 28 New Mexico State at New Mexico

OCT. 4 Jacksonville State at Kennesaw State

OCT. 23 Middle Tennessee at Jacksonville State

OCT. 30 Jacksonville State at Liberty

NOV. 9 Liberty at Middle Tennessee

NOV. 23 WKU at Liberty

NOV. 30 UTEP at New Mexico State

NOV. 30 Jacksonville State at WKU

CUSA RETURNING LEADERS

PASSING	ATT	COMP	PCT	YDS	TD	INT	AVG/G
Nicholas Vattiato, MTSU	428	286	66.8	3,092	23	13	257.7
Keyone Jenkins, FIU	332	194	58.4	2,414	11	11	219.5
Kaidon Salter, Liberty	290	177	61.0	2,876	32	6	205.4

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Quinton Cooley, Liberty	221	1,401	6.3	16	60	100.1
Kaidon Salter, Liberty	163	1,089	6.7	12	52	77.8
Anwar Lewis, Jacksonville St.	93	452	4.9	3	40	50.2

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Kisean Johnson*, Alabama State	62	793	12.8	7	63	79.3
Noah Smith, Sam Houston	79	783	9.9	6	42	65.3
Holden Willis, Middle Tennessee	46	697	15.2	5	62	63.4

DEFENSE

TACKLES
Reggie Peterson, FIU (104); Fred Perry, Jacksonville State (75)

SACKS
Maurice Westmoreland, UTEP (7.5); Issiah Nixon, Sam Houston (5.0)

INTERCEPTIONS
Brylan Green, Liberty (5); two players tied with 4

**Johnson transferred to WKU in the offseason*

RECRUITING RANKING BY SCHOOL

1. Liberty (88)
2. Louisiana Tech (93)
3. UTEP (101)
4. Middle Tennessee (105)
5. WKU (107)
6. FIU (110)
7. New Mexico State (113)
8. Kennesaw State (115)
9. Jacksonville State (122)
10. Sam Houston (125)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

COACHING CAROUSEL

JACKSONVILLE STATE
Defense: New: Luke Olson; Old: Zac Alley

KENNESAW STATE
Offense: New: Chandler Burks, Stewart Cook; Old: Chris Klenakis
Defense: New: Greg Harris; Old: Nathan Burton

LOUISIANA TECH
Offense: New: Scott Parr, Nathan Young; Old: Jake Brown, Scott Parr
Defense: New: Jeremiah Johnson; Old: Scott Power

MIDDLE TENNESSEE
Head Coach: New: Derek Mason; Old: Rick Stockstill
Offense: New: Bodie Reeder; Old: Mitch Stewart
Defense: New: Brian Stewart; Old: Scott Shafer

NEW MEXICO STATE
Head Coach: New: Tony Sanchez; Old: Jerry Kill
Offense: New: Tyler Wright; Old: Tim Beck
Defense: New: Joe Morris; Old: Nate Dreiling

SAM HOUSTON
Defense: New: Skyler Cassity; Old: Clayton Carlin, Joe Morris

UTEP
Head Coach: New: Scotty Walden; Old: Dana Dimel
Offense: New: Jake Brown, Ryan Stanchek; Old: Scotty Ohara
Defense: New: J.J. Clark, Kevin Sigler; Old: Bradley Dale Pevoto

WKU
Offense: Will Friend, Drew Hollingshead; Old: Drew Hollingshead, Zach Lankford

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Roderick Daniels	Edge	Liberty	★★★	44*
2.	Ty Keyes	QB	LA Tech	★★★	60*
3.	Alex Lines	TE	New Mexico State	★★★	63*
4.	Alvin Williams	Edge	Liberty	★★★	69*
5.	Eldric Griffin	S	Liberty	★★★	80*
6.	Jayden Bradford	QB	Liberty	★★★	1,010
7.	Dodge Sauser	IOL	Kennesaw	★★★	99*
8.	Jaylin Jones	Edge	UTEP	★★★	1,245
9.	Kalari Gordon	CB	Kennesaw State	★★★	1,249
10.	Justus Savage	RB	Jacksonville State	★★★	1,257

**Junior college transfer/juco ranking*

FIU PANTHERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 115 | CUSA PREDICTION: 4 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 1-7 CUSA

OFFENSE Dual-threat quarterback Keyone Jenkins was arguably the brightest spot of FIU's 4-8 campaign in 2023. The Miami native rushed for six touchdowns while throwing for more than 2,400 yards last season as a true freshman. In all likelihood, he'll have the starting job again and be more formidable after adding about 12 pounds of muscle in the offseason.

The receiver room's most notable returner is Dean Patterson, who caught 28 passes for 423 yards last season. Leading receiver Khris Mitchell, who went for more than 1,100 yards, transferred to Notre Dame.

FIU will also have the benefit of an experienced running back trio in a healthy Lexington Joseph (who missed 2023 with a knee injury), redshirt junior Kejon Owens and former FCS South Dakota standout Shomari Lawrence. Lawrence was FIU's leading rusher last season with 566 yards, and he added four touchdowns on the ground. The rushing attack will once again come via committee in 2024 behind a younger offensive line that lost two starters from last season's group.

DEFENSE Replacing defensive production is arguably FIU's biggest concern in 2024. Leading tackler Donovan Manuel is off to the pros after recording 218 tackles over the last two seasons. Thankfully for the Panthers, they do return veteran linebacker Reggie Peterson, who had 104 tackles in 2023. He'll likely be the defense's key piece in 2024.

Along the defensive line, there are more holes to fill. Jeramy Passmore will need to step up and be a bigger part of a pass rush that posted only 17 sacks in 2023, putting them near the bottom of FBS.

In general, turnovers have to be more of a priority for the Panthers in the coming season. They finished 2023 with a turnover margin of minus-9. Only seven FBS programs were worse in that department last season.

SPECIALISTS Senior placekicker Chase Gabriel is fairly dependable, making 75 percent of his field goals last season. He missed only one attempt out of five from beyond 40 yards. Punter Daton Montiel, a former All-CUSA selection, returns for his redshirt senior season after averaging 40.6 yards per punt so far in college.

FINAL ANALYSIS Optimism for FIU is usually high in the summer — at least, it has been under head coach Mike MacIntyre. However, the Panthers have to find a way to keep any momentum they establish early in the season. Injuries have definitely been partially to blame, but the Panthers have ended the last two seasons on four-game losing streaks. That chain has to break if this program is going to sneak into bowl contention in 2024.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Indiana
Sept. 7	Central Michigan
Sept. 14	at Florida Atlantic
Sept. 21	Monmouth
Sept. 28	Louisiana Tech
Oct. 9	at Liberty
Oct. 16	at UTEP
Oct. 22	Sam Houston
Oct. 29	New Mexico St.
Nov. 16	at Jacksonville St.
Nov. 23	at Kennesaw St.
Nov. 30	Middle Tennessee

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 1-7 CUSA)

Aug. 26	at Louisiana Tech	L	17-22
Sept. 2	Maine	W	14-12
Sept. 9	North Texas	W	46-39
Sept. 16	at Connecticut	W	24-17
Sept. 23	Liberty	L	6-38
Oct. 4	at New Mexico St.	L	17-34
Oct. 11	UTEP	L	14-27
Oct. 18	at Sam Houston (ot)	W	33-27
Oct. 25	Jacksonville State	L	16-41
Nov. 11	at Middle Tennessee	L	6-40
Nov. 18	at Arkansas	L	20-45
Nov. 25	WKU	L	28-41

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Devonte Lyons, RB	★★★
2.	Germaine Carter, DL	★★★
3.	Dwight Nunoo, LB	★★★
4.	Nicholas Smith, WR	★★★
5.	Clayton Dees, QB	★★★
6.	Shamir Sterlin, S	★★★
7.	Travion Barnes, LB	★★★
8.	Jaden Williams, S	★★★
9.	Jonathan Rodriguez, OL	★★★
10.	Josiah Taylor, LB	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike MacIntyre • Record at School: 8-16 (2 years) • Career Record: 54-81 (11 years)
Offensive Coordinator: David Yost • Defensive Coordinator: Jovan Dewitt • Location: University Park, Fla.
Stadium: FIU Football Stadium (23,500)

Keyone Jenkins

SCOUTING THE PANTHERS

"This is going to be a tough year for Mike [MacIntyre]; they're not noticeably better at any position, and he's staring at a third losing season. They've got some decent pieces on offense — the running back who they lost to injury last year is pretty good. Where it really shows is on defense. They're just not that talented, and they're shuffling guys in and out with the portal and graduation. They're so far behind FAU now in the Miami area that they're just not getting the kind of guys they used to keep home and away from bigger programs. Expect another tough season here; this is a team that's really in need of an overhaul."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	3	Eric Rivers (Jr.)	16	Ja'Coby Matthews (Sr.)
WR	11	**DEAN PATTERSON (JR.)**	7	Mike Jackson (So.)
WR	19	Ross Fournet (Jr.)	13	Juju Lewis (So.)
LT	79	Daniel Ogundipe (Jr.)	72	Ben Shellenback (Sr.)
LG	78	Jaleel Davis (So.)		Ja'Kavio Nonar (Fr.)
C	69	Ming Tjon (Jr.)		Jonathan Rodriguez (Fr.)
RG	55	**WYATT LAWSON (JR.)**	73	Sam Hill (Sr.)
RT	56	JaDarious Lee (So.)	77	**TRAVIS BURKE (JR.)**
TE	88	Josiah Miamen (Sr.)	89	Rocky Beers (Jr.)
QB	1	**KEYONE JENKINS (SO.)**	4	Haden Carlson (Jr.)
RB	0	**SHOMARI LAWRENCE (JR.)**	5	Kejon Owens (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	8	**JERAMY PASSMORE (SR.)**	17	Claude Larkins (So.)
NT	95	Quaylen Hill (Jr.)	93	Cole Gustafson (Jr.)
DE	41	Giovanni Davis (Sr.)	5	Steven Shannon (So.)
OLB	45	Toddrick Brewton (So.)	34	Eddie Walls III (Jr.)
MLB	15	Elijah Anderson-Taylor (Sr.)	23	Percy Courtney Jr. (So.)
OLB	0	**REGGIE PETERSON (SR.)**	6	Travion Barnes (Jr.)
CB	12	**HEZEKIAH MASSES (JR.)**	26	Victor Evans III (Fr.)
CB	2	**BRIAN BLADES II (JR.)**	27	Mister Clark (Fr.)
NB	7	**JAMAL POTTS (SR.)**	47	Rodney Williams Jr (So.)
SS	32	Bobby Salla Jr. (Jr.)	6	Antonio Patterson (So.)
FS	4	**CJ CHRISTIAN (SR.)**	24	Ashton Levells (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	37	Chase Gabriel (Sr.)	KR	19	Ross Fournet (Jr.)
P	25	Daton Montiel (Sr.)	PR	11	Dean Patterson (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

David Butler II-USA TODAY Sports

Anwar Lewis

SCOUTING THE GAMECOCKS

"One of the best offenses in the league run by a guy [Rich Rodriguez] who basically mastered the concept. They're fast and talented and can really make you look stupid. They're not as deep as Liberty, but they've been building talent for that system these last few cycles. What I'd expect to see next is an evolution of the base concepts; you start expecting more trick plays, more gadget stuff. They've brought in a few new defensive pieces, and they're a better program overall than the last few seasons. They have the coaching and talent to compete for a conference title."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	89	Brock Rechsteiner (Jr.)	16	Dallan Wright (Jr.)
WR	13	P.J. Wells (Sr.)	88	Jordan McCants (So.)
WR	2	**MICHAEL PETTWAY (JR.)**	14	Brannon Spector (Sr.)
LT	73	**WILL O'STEEN (JR.)**	79	Tom Hadary (Fr.)
LG	74	**CLAY WEBB (SR.)**	54	Daveion Harley (So.)
C	55	Maddox Sunderman (Fr.)	60	Cameron Griffin (So.)
RG	60	Cameron Griffin (So.)	**78**	**BROCK ROBEY (SR.)**
RT	69	Cam Jones (Sr.)	71	K.D. Arnold (So.)
TE	17	**SEAN BROWN (SR.)**	81	Jacob Barrick (Jr.)
QB	7	Logan Smothers (Sr.)	11	Zion Turner (So.)
RB	25	Anwar Lewis (Sr.)	35	Ty Waymon (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	95	Keyon Clark (So.)	94	Jumarion Larry (So.)
NT	97	Ricky Samuel (Sr.)	98	Jackson Veasy (Fr.)
DT	96	Darrell Prater (So.)	89	Javius Hudgins (Fr.)
OLB	30	**J-ROCK SWAIN (SR.)**	41	Curley Young Jr. (Sr.)
MLB	16	**LALETIA HALE (SR.)**	34	Dajwon DeLoach (So.)
OLB	5	Reginald Hughes (Jr.)	15	Jibreel Al-Amin (So.)
CB	4	Jabari Mack (Jr.)	8	Geimere Latimer (So.)
CB	13	**DEREK CARTER (JR.)**	2	Marco Baker (Sr.)
NB	23	Jalen Bustamante (Sr.)	27	Austin Ambush (Jr.)
SS	21	Ky'won McCray (Sr.)	12	Kam Snell (Sr.)
FS	6	**FRED PERRY (JR.)**	20	Travis Franklin Jr. (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	37	Garrison Rippa (Fr.)	KR	2 Michael Pettway (Jr.)
P	87	Jack Dawson (Sr.)	PR	2 Michael Pettway (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Dave Hyatt: Hyatt Media LLC

JACKSONVILLE STATE GAMECOCKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 87 | CUSA PREDICTION: 3 | 2023 RECORD: 9-4, 6-2 CUSA

OFFENSE Even in 2024, Rich Rodriguez's brand of offensive football is very entertaining television. Last season, Jacksonville State utilized a two-quarterback system with Nebraska transfer Logan Smothers and the speedy Zion Webb. Webb has graduated, but Smothers returns this season after rushing for seven touchdowns and throwing for six in 2023.

Replacing Webb is speedy UConn transfer Zion Turner. Turner's skill set closely resembles that of Webb, in that he's an effective dual threat and proven winner when he's healthy. Turner led UConn to its best record since 2015 (6-7) as the starter in 2022.

All-Conference USA running back Malik Jackson has also graduated, and replacing his 979 yards from scrimmage isn't as much of a sure thing. Senior Anwar Lewis was limited by injury in 2023, but he certainly had his moments, including 122 yards and a touchdown against Louisiana Tech. The rushing attack should once again be the focal point of an offense that ran the ball nearly 65 percent of the time last season.

DEFENSE Jacksonville State's defense was the best in the league last season, posting 39 sacks and allowing only 21.2 points per game. Former defensive coordinator Zac Alley left for a role with Oklahoma in the offseason, so the Gamecocks are hoping to sustain momentum under new DC and longtime Tulsa assistant Luke Olson. They also have to overcome the loss of first-team All-CUSA defensive lineman Chris Hardie, who transferred during the offseason.

In the secondary, the most intriguing piece is redshirt junior cornerback Derek Carter. Carter was a second-team All-CUSA selection after breaking up a team-high eight passes and making 44 tackles. The Gamecocks picked off a solid 16 passes last season.

Jacksonville State's defense last season was stellar against the run, allowing just 2.8 yards per carry in 2023 to rank fourth in FBS in that category. Keeping that up will be a lofty but clearly attainable goal.

SPECIALISTS Punter Jack Dawson returns for his senior season after earning All-CUSA honorable mention recognition in 2023. He had more punts land inside the opposing 20-yard line (23) than anybody else in the conference last season. Placekicker Garrison Rippa saw limited action with just two made field goals, but he should get the full-time role this season. Michael Pettway is the likely kick return specialist.

FINAL ANALYSIS If the Gamecocks keep doing what they've been doing under Rodriguez, things are going to continue to trend upward. They may even be a dark horse for a Conference USA title game berth in 2024.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Coastal Carolina
Sept. 7	at Louisville
Sept. 14	at East. Michigan
Sept. 21	Southern Miss
Oct. 4	at Kennesaw St.
Oct. 9	New Mexico St.
Oct. 23	Middle Tennessee
Oct. 30	at Liberty
Nov. 9	at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 16	FIU
Nov. 23	Sam Houston
Nov. 30	at WKU

2023 RESULTS (9-4, 6-2 CUSA)

Aug. 26	UTEP	W	17-14
Sept. 2	East Tennessee St.	W	49-3
Sept. 9	at Coastal Carolina	L	16-30
Sept. 23	Eastern Michigan	W	21-0
Sept. 28	at Sam Houston (ot)	W	35-28
Oct. 4	at Middle Tennessee	W	45-30
Oct. 10	Liberty	L	13-31
Oct. 17	WKU	W	20-17
Oct. 25	at FIU	W	41-16
Nov. 4	at South Carolina	L	28-38
Nov. 18	Louisiana Tech	W	56-17
Nov. 25	at New Mexico St.	L	17-20
Dec. 16	vs. Louisiana # (ot)	W	34-31

#New Orleans Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Nick Igbeare, DL	★★★
2.	Justus Savage, RB	★★★
3.	Marc Woods, S	★★★
4.	Walter Reddick, EDGE	★★★
5.	Andre Devine, RB	★★★
6.	Jawaun Campbell, DL	★★★
7.	Amare' Grayson, OL	★★★
8.	Arrington Watkins, QB	★★★
9.	Alex Moore, TE	★★★
10.	Jayke Jones, ATH	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Rich Rodriguez • Record at School: 18-6 (2 years) • Career Record: 181-125-2 (26 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Rod Smith • Defensive Coordinator: Luke Olson • Location: Jacksonville, Ala.
Stadium: JSU Stadium (24,000)

KENNESAW STATE OWLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 134 | CUSA PREDICTION: 10 | 2023 RECORD: 3-6

OFFENSE Since 2015, Kennesaw State has averaged 297.6 rushing yards per game. Granted, the Owls haven't played a high level of competition, but that number is higher than any of the state of Georgia's FBS programs in that time span.

The zone read/RPO offense will, unsurprisingly, depend on quarterback play. The graduation of multi-year starter Jonathan Murphy leaves rising junior Davis Bryson is the only QB currently on the roster who threw a pass last season. Whoever takes over at quarterback will need to be mobile. The Owls ran 362 running plays compared to 169 pass plays in 2023, and the quarterback ran with the ball on more than a third of those rushing plays. A younger offensive line will also need to be ready for the challenges that the scheme presents against FBS competition.

Senior running back Michael Benefield will play a key role. He finished the season strong with two touchdowns in each of the Owls' final three games. Leading returning receiver Gabriel Benyard, whose position is technically running back, will also be utilized all over the field as well as in the return game.When the Owls do pass the ball, look for them to get Virginia Tech transfer and Kennesaw native Christian Moss involved.

DEFENSE On paper, it's a challenge to assess the Owls defense. Kennesaw State played a short nine-game schedule last season, and the three games they won were against non-FBS opponents.

Junior linebacker Donelius Johnson will likely be the most important returning player after recording 40 tackles with 2.5 sacks and six tackles for a loss. The defense will rely on Johnson for leadership after last season's two best defensive players departed via graduation (Markeith Montgomery) and transfer (Deontre Morris).

Thankfully, the group will also get a significant boost from South Carolina transfer linebacker Donovan Westmoreland. Westmoreland is the highest-rated recruit in Kennesaw State history with a 247Sports composite score of 0.8915.

SPECIALISTS The placekicking was poor in 2023, as the Owls connected on only 6-of-16 field-goal attempts. Senior punter Joshua Huiet is fairly solid, averaging 42.9 yards per punt with eight of 50-plus yards. In the return game, Benyard is worth watching after quickly setting program records for punt and kick return yardage since his arrival in 2021.

FINAL ANALYSIS Jumping to FBS isn't as easy as James Madison made it look. However, Kennesaw State has the fan/donor support and the geographical market to make it work long term. In the short term, it's going to come down to how the returning talent adjusts to the increase in opposing size and speed.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at UTSA
Sept. 7	Louisiana
Sept. 14	at San Jose St.
Sept. 28	Tennessee-Martin
Oct. 4	Jacksonville St.
Oct. 15	at Middle Tenn.
Oct. 23	Liberty
Oct. 30	at WKU
Nov. 9	at UTEP
Nov. 16	Sam Houston
Nov. 23	FIU
Nov. 30	at Lousiana Tech

2023 RESULTS (3-6)

Aug. 31	Tusculum	W	38-7
Sept. 9	at Chattanooga	L	20-27
Sept. 16	Furman	L	28-31
Sept. 23	at Tennessee Tech	L	7-17
Sept. 30	at Charleston Southern	L	10-13
Oct. 7	Tennessee State	L	20-27
Oct. 28	Lincoln (CA)	W	28-12
Nov. 4	at Sam Houston	L	21-24
Nov. 11	Virginia-Lynchburg	W	63-3

TOP 10 RECRUITS

1.	Kalari Gordon, OL	★★★
2.	Devin Ross, CB	★★★
3.	Dodge Sauser, OL	★★★
4.	Jaiden Grimes, DL	★★★
5.	Jaiden Kimble, LB	★★★
6.	Terrence Curtis, CB	★★★
7.	Jaden Robinson, WR	★★★
8.	Jarvis Adams, OL	★★★
9.	Christopher Cain, OL	★★★
10.	Javon Rogers, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brian Bohannon • Record at School: 71-30 (9 years) • Career Record: 71-30 (9 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Chris Klenakis • Defensive Coordinator: Greg Harris • Location: Kennesaw, Ga.
Stadium: Fifth Third Stadium (8,318)

Gabriel Benyard

Jamie Spaar

SCOUTING THE OWLS

"I would expect them to look a lot like last year's New Mexico State or what Jacksonville State is doing right now — a lot of QB run. They're in the middle of a transition, so it's hard to make objective criticisms, but they've lost a lot from when they ran the triple option. It's understandable because there's a recruiting concern at the next level. They've got a pretty brutal opening run, and they're going to struggle with depth, especially on defense. I would expect them to look a lot like Sam Houston did in that first full FBS year of transition."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	6	Christian Moss (Jr.)	80	Connor Finer (Jr.)
WR	8	Tykeem Wallace (Jr.)	27	Josh Williamson (So.)
WR	5	**BLAKE BOHANNON (JR.)**	39	Mossiah Carter (Jr.)
LT	75	Dodge Sauser (Jr.)	61	Darron Willis (Jr.)
LG	65	JT Pennington (Jr.)		Jacob Norcross (Fr.)
C	62	Chris Cain (So.)	66	Zacchaeus Williams (Jr.)
RG	66	Zacchaeus Williams (Jr.)	76	Brian Habeck (So.)
RT	61	**DARRON WILLIS (JR.)**	55	Seaburn Hines (Jr.)
TE	86	**CARSON KENT (SO.)**	2	Preston Daniels (Sr.)
QB	9	Davis Bryson (So.)	19	Braden Bohannon (So.)
RB	1	Gabriel Benyard (Jr.)	0	**MICHAEL BENEFIELD (SR.)**

DEFENSE (6)

DE	94	**JORDAN MILES (JR.)**	58	**JAHON MYERS (JR.)**
DT	99	**THOMARIUS WAKER (JR.)**	90	Ugonna Nwoha (Fr.)
DT	97	Adam Watkins (Jr.)	60	Jaylan Jarrett (Fr.)
DE	96	Donovan Westmoreland (So.)	59	Nicholas Charles (So.)
LB	48	**DONELIUS JOHNSON (SO.)**	46	Joshua Bogan (Sr.)
LB	14	**JALEN BARNUM (SR.)**	7	**GARLAND BENYARD (JR.)**
CB	28	JeRico Washington Jr. (Fr.)	20	Tyler Hallum (Jr.)
CB	15	Jayven Williams (So.)	31	Isaac Paul (Fr.)
NB	31	Isaac Paul (Fr.)	42	Danarius Johnson (So.)
SS	11	Sidney Porter (Jr.)	35	Markell Redding (Fr.)
FS	40	Milon Jones (Jr.)	29	Qway McCoy (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	78	Britton Williams (Jr.)	KR	1	Gabriel Benyard (Jr.)
P	90	Joshua Huiet (Jr.)	PR	1	Gabriel Benyard (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Kaidon Salter

SCOUTING THE FLAMES

"It's honestly not fair to the rest of the league. You can't compare anyone to this program in terms of depth, resources, coaching and development. [Jamey] Chadwell was a huge steal for them, and they'll dominate the league as long as he's there. ... They should be a lock for the conference title game. The bigger question here is if they can fight for that G5 playoff spot. They have a chance with App State on the schedule. Can they build on last year and try to close that gap with the big boys? There's no competition for them in the league. Maybe WKU or Jacksonville State, but there's a significant gap."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	9	Donte Lee Jr. (So.)	81	Markel Fortenberry (So.)
WR	21	Treon Sibley (Sr.)	14	Kylen Austin (Jr.)
WR	8	Tyson Mobley (Jr.)		Julian Gray (Jr.)
LT	75	Jack Tucker (Jr.)	68	Hunter Porterfield (Jr.)
LG	67	John Paul Flores (Sr.)	78	Brian Hannibal (Jr.)
C	53	**JORDAN WHITE (JR.)**	61	Aaron Fenimore (So.)
RG	51	Harrison Hayes (Jr.)	78	Brian Hannibal (Jr.)
RT	63	**XAVIOR GRAY (JR.)**	68	Hunter Porterfield (Jr.)
TE	15	**BENTLEY HANSHAW (SR.)**	83	**AUSTIN HENDERSON (JR.)**
QB	7	**KAIDON SALTER (JR.)**	18	Ryan Burger (So.)
RB	20	**QUINTON COOLEY (SR.)**	0	Billy Lucas (Sr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	3	**TJ BUSH (SO.)**	49	Grey Carroll (Jr.)
DT	4	Jay Hardy (Sr.)	92	Chris Boti (Jr.)
DT	99	**BRYCE DIXON (JR.)**	93	Eli Hall (So.)
DE	11	**CJ BAZILE JR. (JR.)**	17	Bryson Jennings (So.)
MLB	6	Teylor Jackson (Sr.)	25	**JOSEPH CARTER (JR.)**
OLB	9	Jahmar Brown (Sr.)	0	Jerome Jolly Jr. (Sr.)
STAR	16	**QUINTON REESE (SR.)**	29	A'Khori Jones (Jr.)
CB	20	Dexter Ricks Jr. (So.)	13	Dominick Hill (Sr.)
CB	26	**AMARIAN WILLIAMS (JR.)**	31	Christian Bodnar (Fr.)
S	2	Eldric Griffin (Jr.)	22	Jayden Sweeney (So.)
S	15	Brylan Green (Jr.)	21	Marquis Bell (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	42	Nick Brown (Jr.)	KR	9 Donte Lee Jr. (So.)
P	37	Max Morgan (Jr.)	PR	15 Brylan Green (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Brian Bishop-USA TODAY Sports

LIBERTY FLAMES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 30 | CUSA PREDICTION: 1 | 2023 RECORD: 13-1, 8-0 CUSA

OFFENSE Head coach Jamey Chadwell's biggest wins of the offseason were keeping both quarterback Kaidon Salter and running back Quinton Cooley on campus. Both players were instrumental in the Flames' 13-1 record, Conference USA title and Fiesta Bowl berth in 2023. Liberty had the top rushing offense in FBS with 293.3 yards on the ground per game.

In fact, the rushing offense was so effective that the Flames had nearly double the number of rushing first downs (207) as passing (114) in 2023. That's not to say that Salter was an ineffective passer, though. The former Tennessee Volunteer completed 61 percent of his passes with 32 touchdowns last year.

The Flames do need to replace 1,000-yard receiver CJ Daniels, who is now with LSU. Coastal Carolina transfer Tyson Mobley is one possible candidate, although he had only one season of at least 40 catches with his previous program.

DEFENSE The Flames need to replace a lot of talent on defense. While they intercepted an FBS-high 21 passes in 2024, they lost multiple starters from the secondary — Kobe Singleton and Preston Hodge — to Power 4 programs. However, FWAA All-America safety Brylan Green does return after intercepting five passes in 2023, and he's joined by starting cornerback Amarian Williams, who broke up four passes last season.

In the front seven, Liberty also needs to replace CUSA Defensive Player of the Year Tyren Dupree at linebacker. Former East Carolina starter Teylor Jackson is the most likely candidate after posting 52 tackles for the Pirates last season. He will look to help re-solidify a defense that allowed 24.3 points and 372.8 yards per game in 2023.

SPECIALISTS Punter Max Morgan returns after averaging 41.9 yards per punt over the last two years. Kicker Nick Brown made all but one of his 66 extra-point attempts last year, and the lone miss was in the final game of the season. The return specialist job is open, with Aaron Bedgood having moved on to the pros.

FINAL ANALYSIS The defending CUSA champions have a path back to the title game in front of them. They lost some notable pieces, but the return of Salter and another schedule that's less than intimidating help their cause. Their non-conference date with Appalachian State on Sept. 28 is arguably their most compelling matchup.

Running opposing defenses off the field propelled Liberty to the Fiesta Bowl last year. Expect the Flames to try that approach again in 2024.

2023 RESULTS (13-1, 8-0 CUSA)

Sept. 2	Bowling Green	W 34-24
Sept. 9	New Mexico State	W 33-17
Sept. 16	at Buffalo	W 55-27
Sept. 23	at FIU	W 38-6
Oct. 5	Sam Houston	W 21-16
Oct. 10	at Jacksonville St.	W 31-13
Oct. 17	Middle Tennessee	W 42-35
Oct. 24	at WKU	W 42-29
Nov. 4	Louisiana Tech	W 56-30
Nov. 11	Old Dominion	W 38-10
Nov. 18	Massachusetts	W 49-25
Nov. 25	at UTEP	W 42-28
Dec. 1	New Mexico State #	W 49-35
Jan. 1	vs. Oregon %	L 6-45

#C-USA Championship %Fiesta Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Campbell
Sept. 7	at New Mexico St.
Sept. 14	UTEP
Sept. 21	East Carolina
Sept. 28	at App State
Oct. 9	FIU
Oct. 23	at Kennesaw St.
Oct. 30	Jacksonville St.
Nov. 9	at Middle Tenn.
Nov. 16	at Massachusetts
Nov. 23	WKU
Nov. 30	at Sam Houston

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Alvin Williams, EDGE	★★★
2.	Jayden Bradford, QB	★★★
3.	Kaidon Whidby, LB	★★★
4.	Caden Williams, RB	★★★
5.	Roderick Daniels, EDGE	★★★
6.	Eric Smith, WR	★★★
7.	Eli Sisson, TE	★★★
8.	Devin Henderson, ATH	★★★
9.	Jonathan Monteiro, WR	★★★
10.	Izaiah Taylor, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jamey Chadwell • Record at School: 13-1 (1 year) • Career Record: 112-58 (14 years)
Offensive Coordinators: Willy Korn, Newland Isaac • Defensive Coordinator: Skylor Magee • Location: Lynchburg, Va.
Stadium: Williams Stadium (25,000)

LOUISIANA TECH BULLDOGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 122 | CUSA PREDICTION: 7 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 CUSA

OFFENSE Bulldogs quarterback Jack Turner showed potential last season, playing in eight games in relief of Hank Bachmeier and throwing five touchdowns and five interceptions. If Turner becomes the full-time starter, which he likely will based on his performance in the spring, the 6-foot-5 signal-caller will have to show just how much he's developed.

Turner will be throwing the ball to a few new faces. Abdul-Fatai Ibrahim was a three-time first-team SWAC performer at FCS Alabama A&M before spending last season at Bowling Green. Head coach Sonny Cumbie has expressed higher expectations for Marlion Jackson after a 12-catch season last year. Departures in the wide receiver room open the possibility for younger players like Jackson to see their roles increase significantly.

Running back Marquis Crosby missed most of last season with injury, but he rushed for 918 yards and nine touchdowns in 2022.

DEFENSE Tech had the No. 114 scoring defense in FBS last season, allowing 33.4 points per game. The Bulldogs allowed 40 or more points in four losses during their 3-9 campaign, finishing with six straight defeats.

Defensive lineman Mykol Clark should be an important piece of correcting that. The Bulldogs need a spark in the pass rush after picking up only 16 sacks as a team last season. Also assisting in that effort, theoretically, will be North Texas transfer outside linebacker Sifa Leota. Leota had 23 tackles with 4.5 TFLs and 2.5 sacks with a forced fumble in 2022, the last season in which he saw action.

The biggest defensive bright spot in 2023 was CUSA Freshman of the Year Michael Richard, who broke up seven passes at his cornerback spot.

The Bulldogs are hoping for better depth at just about every defensive position, thanks largely to an aggressive push in the portal. At safety, the additions of Jordyn Morgan (UNLV) and Blake Thompson (Iowa State) should help a unit that allowed 67 plays of 20 yards or more last season.

SPECIALISTS Junior kicker Buck Buchanan will try to replace former All-CUSA performer Jacob Barnes. Buchanan handled kickoff duties last season and did hit two field goals, including a 53-yarder against Sam Houston. At punter, Australian Patrick Rea will take over after being the holder last season. Kick return duties will likely be a split job to replace longtime standout Smoke Harris.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Bulldogs have regressed since the Skip Holtz era. Cumbie's staff needs a step forward this season. A third consecutive 3-9 season likely will not cut it, especially since athletic director Ryan Ivey has an excellent track record when it comes to hiring football coaches at Stephen F. Austin, Austin Peay and Texas A&M-Commerce.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Nicholls State
Sept. 14	at NC State
Sept. 21	Tulsa
Sept. 28	at FIU
Oct. 10	Middle Tennessee
Oct. 15	at New Mexico St.
Oct. 22	UTEP
Oct. 29	at Sam Houston
Nov. 9	Jacksonville St.
Nov. 16	at WKU
Nov. 23	at Arkansas
Nov. 30	Kennesaw State

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 CUSA)

Aug. 26	FIU	W	22-17
Sept. 2	at SMU	L	14-38
Sept. 9	Northwestern St.	W	51-21
Sept. 16	North Texas	L	37-40
Sept. 23	at Nebraska	L	14-28
Sept. 29	at UTEP	W	24-10
Oct. 5	WKU	L	28-35
Oct. 10	at Middle Tennessee	L	23-31
Oct. 24	New Mexico State	L	24-27
Nov. 4	at Liberty	L	30-56
Nov. 11	Sam Houston	L	27-42
Nov. 18	at Jacksonville St.	L	17-56

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Tamarcus Gray, WR	★★★
2.	Ty Keyes, QB	★★★
3.	Navarion Benson, CB	★★★
4.	Adam Lamar, DL	★★★
5.	Trevell Vivians, DL	★★★
6.	Jadon Mayfield, LB	★★★
7.	Omiri Wiggins, RB	★★★
8.	Hunter Tipton, TE	★★★
9.	Jakari Foster, S	★★★
10.	Jacob Bradford, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Sonny Cumbie • Record at School: 6-18 (2 years) • Career Record: 8-21 (2+ years)
Offensive Coordinators: Scott Parr, Nathan Young • Defensive Coordinators: Jeremiah Johnson, Jeff Burris
Location: Ruston, La. • Stadium: Joe Aillet Stadium (28,562)

Marquis Crosby

SCOUTING THE BULLDOGS

"Sonny Cumbie is definitely on the hot seat here. They've done some good things since last season, getting better defensive players in there from the portal, and the quarterback [Jack Turner] is pretty solid, but this program seems to be in disarray. The A.D. who hired him just left for an assistant job in the SEC. There's not a lot to get excited about here. On paper this should be a really good program in CUSA if you can put the right kind of support into it. They've fallen far behind Louisiana and Tulane in the competition to be the second-best program in the state. Maybe they can pull off a .500 year and buy the coach some time."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	2	Solo Lewis (Jr.)	11	Decoldest Crawford (So.)
WR	9	Marlion Jackson (So.)	16	Tru Edwards (Sr.)
WR	18	Abdul-Fatai Ibrahim (Sr.)	80	Dedrick Latulas (So.)
LT	73	Kenneth Bannister (Jr.)	72	Hayden Christman (Fr.)
LG	79	**BERT HALE (SR.)**	54	Zarian McGill (Sr.)
C	55	Landon Nelson (Jr.)	69	Caleb Billiot (Jr.)
RG	75	**JERREN GILBERT (SR.)**	51	Daniel Keys (Sr.)
RT	67	Brett Canis (Jr.)	78	Ashanti Cole (Jr.)
TE	17	Nate Jones (Sr.)	84	Eli Finley (So.)
QB	10	Jack Turner (Jr.)	7	Evan Bullock (Fr.)
RB	3	**MARQUIS CROSBY (JR.)**	4	Donerio Davenport (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

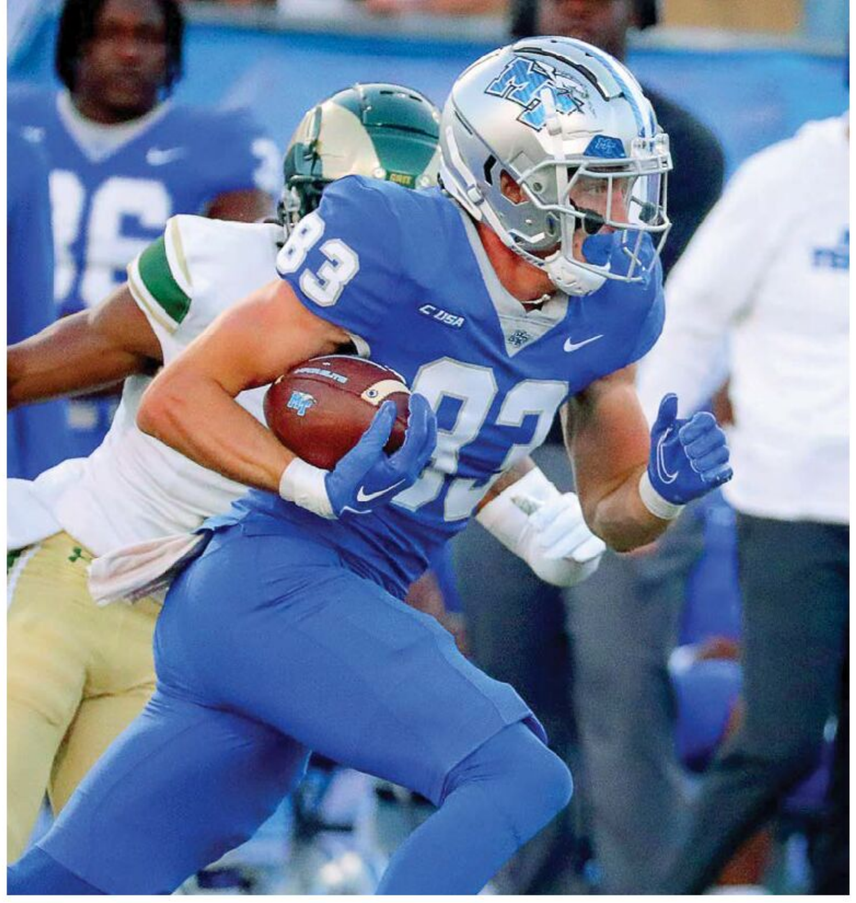
DE	88	**MYKOL CLARK (SR.)**	7	Jayden Gray (Jr.)
DT	96	Zion Nason (Sr.)	48	Kells Bush (Fr.)
DT	90	David Blay (Jr.)	93	Keenan Landry (Jr.)
DE	20	**J'DAN BURNETT (JR.)**	2	Jessie Evans (Sr.)
OLB	42	Sifa Leota (Jr.)	25	Colton Deckard (Fr.)
MLB	21	Zach Zimos (Sr.)	13	Jamarcus Jones (Jr.)
CB	16	Emmonte Davis (Sr.)	5	Michael Richard (So.)
CB	11	**CEDRIC WOODS (SR.)**	4	Jhamal Shelby Jr. (So.)
NB	8	Demarcus Griffin-Taylor (Sr.)	31	Blake Thompson (So.)
SS	27	Isaiah Mcelvane (Sr.)	19	Roderick Roberson (Sr.)
FS	17	Zion Hopes (Jr.)	1	Jordyn Morgan (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	15	Buck Buchanan (Jr.)	KR	8	Demarcus Griffin-Taylor (Sr.)
P	32	Patrick Rea (So.)	PR	80	Dedrick Latulas (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Ken Ruinard-USA TODAY Sports



Holden Willis

SCOUTING THE BLUE RAIDERS

"Definitely a program long overdue for some fresh ideas. This was a good move on both sides, because [Derek] Mason is a really sharp defensive mind and a great coach, and he can recruit an area he knows extremely well without dealing with the headaches of Vanderbilt. MTSU isn't starting a hard reset. This program should be neck and neck with WKU to try to beat Liberty; they have the talent and a great recruiting area. ... They're already working the portal pretty well. It's smart to keep last year's QB and build around him. The Auburn receiver [Omari Kelly] is gonna be a big target for them. Expect some creative run game stuff from when he was at Vandy. They're gonna want to shorten games at first."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	87	Kellen Stewart (Jr.)	17	Gamarion Carter (Jr.)
WR	13	**JAVONTE SHERMAN (JR.)**	89	Elijah Ealy (Jr.)
WR	1	Omari Kelly (Jr.)	81	Mitchell Howell (Sr.)
LT	72	Morgan Scott (Sr.)	61	J'Shun Bodiford (Sr.)
LG	74	Ethan Ellis (Sr.)	55	Mateo Guevara (So.)
C	65	**JULIUS PIERCE (SR.)**	55	Mateo Guevara (So.)
RG	56	Ellis Adams (Sr.)	66	Daniel Gonzalez (Sr.)
RT	61	J'Shun Bodiford (Sr.)	75	Dumela Knox (Jr.)
TE	83	**HOLDEN WILLIS (SR.)**	82	Taharin Sudderth (Jr.)
QB	11	**NICHOLAS VATTIATO (JR.)**	18	Stone Frost (Sr.)
RB	22	Jaiden Credle (Jr.)	**24**	**FRANK PEASANT (SR.)**

DEFENSE (2)

DE	89	Brandon Buckner (Jr.)	40	Anthony Bynum (Fr.)
DT	92	Damonte Smith (Jr.)	58	Felix Hixon (So.)
DT	90	Chayce Smith (Fr.)	96	Kasey Bonds (So.)
DE	49	James Stewart (Jr.)	94	Ralph Mency (Sr.)
OLB	10	Drew Francis (Sr.)	**21**	**PARKER HUGHES (JR.)**
ILB	12	Jalen Davis (Sr.)	8	Devyn Curtis (Sr.)
OLB	59	Jacob Jackson (Sr.)	42	DaShawn Elder (Jr.)
CB	23	Jalen Jackson (Sr.)	28	De'Arre McDonald (Sr.)
CB	29	**TYRELL RABY (JR.)**	4	James Monds III (So.)
SS	22	Chris Johnson (Jr.)	7	Brendon Harris (Sr.)
FS	46	Marvae Myers (Sr.)	27	Rickey Smith (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	7	Zeke Rankin (Sr.)	KR	87 Kellen Stewart (Jr.)
P	99	Trey Turk (Sr.)	PR	87 Kellen Stewart (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

HELEN COMER/The Daily News Journal

MIDDLE TENNESSEE BLUE RAIDERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 119 | CUSA PREDICTION: 6 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 CUSA

OFFENSE Last season, MTSU was decidedly average on offense, ranking fifth out of CUSA's nine teams in total offense and averaging 5.7 yards per play. A highlight, however, was the play of tight end Holden Willis, who led the team in receiving yardage with 697 and averaged 15 yards per catch. Willis was one of two first-team All-CUSA selections from MTSU and the only one returning.

At quarterback, the Blue Raiders return redshirt junior dual-threat Nicholas Vattiato as the likely starter. He started every game for MTSU last season and posted 3,092 passing yards on 286 completions with 23 touchdowns, adding a career-best 397 rushing yards. His progress under new offensive coordinator Bodie Reeder should be interesting to watch.

Leading rusher Jaiden Credle (427 yards) also returns, alongside UConn transfer running back Brian Brewton and veteran Frank Peasant. Peasant should be back at full strength after being limited by injury in 2023. They'll be working behind an offensive line that lost several players with starting experience to graduation and the transfer portal.

DEFENSE Like the offense, the defense will be working under a new coordinator in Brian Stewart. There are also important pieces to replace on that side of the ball. The three leading tacklers from 2023 have all either graduated or transferred.

Among the new faces, former four-star safety Brendon Harris transferred in after a six-year college career that has included stops at Vanderbilt and Wake Forest. He'll look to help improve a defense that forced fewer turnovers per game than 88 other FBS teams last year. While there are few returners, redshirt senior linebacker Drew Francis is back after posting 3.5 tackles for a loss in each of the last two seasons.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Zeke Rankin returns for his redshirt senior season with a career field goal percentage of 76.6. He's missed just two extra points out of 82 tries over the last two years. Punter Trey Turk also returns after a 2023 season in which he landed 12 punts inside the opponent's 20-yard line. Receiver Kellen Stewart will likely get more of the return duties this season after taking a handful last year.

FINAL ANALYSIS Even with the sense of newness surrounding MTSU, it's still a very experienced team. Blue Raider fans are likely tired of having an average football program, but there are worse alternatives. One thing that isn't new for the club that former Vanderbilt head coach Derek Mason inherited: another brutal non-conference schedule. MTSU plays Ole Miss, Duke and Memphis in the first month of the season. How the Blue Raiders fare during that stretch will be telling.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Tennessee Tech
Sept. 7	at Ole Miss
Sept. 14	WKU
Sept. 21	Duke
Sept. 28	at Memphis
Oct. 10	at Louisiana Tech
Oct. 15	Kennesaw State
Oct. 23	at Jacksonville St.
Nov. 2	at UTEP
Nov. 9	Liberty
Nov. 23	New Mexico St.
Nov. 30	at FIU

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 CUSA)

Sept. 2	at Alabama	L	7-56
Sept. 9	at Missouri	L	19-23
Sept. 16	Murray State	W	35-14
Sept. 23	Colorado State	L	23-31
Sept. 28	at WKU	L	10-31
Oct. 4	Jacksonville State	L	30-45
Oct. 10	Louisiana Tech	W	31-23
Oct. 17	at Liberty	L	35-42
Nov. 4	at New Mexico St.	L	7-13
Nov. 11	FIU	W	40-6
Nov. 18	UTEP	W	34-30
Nov. 25	at Sam Houston	L	20-23

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Brody Benke, TE	★★★
2.	Shamar Crawford, OL	★★★
3.	Roman Gagliano, QB	★★★
4.	Kedrick Burley, LB	★★★
5.	Dumela Knox, OT	★★★
6.	Zeion Simpson, EDGE	★★★
7.	Amarrien Bailey, LB	★★★
8.	Jordan Beasley, ATH	★★★
9.	Joshua Evans, WR	★★★
10.	Aidan Butts, EDGE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Derek Mason • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 27-55 (6+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Bodie Reeder • Defensive Coordinator: Brian Stewart • Location: Murfreesboro, Tenn.
Stadium: Floyd Stadium (30,788)

NEW MEXICO STATE AGGIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 127 | CUSA PREDICTION: 8 | 2023 RECORD: 10-5, 7-1 CUSA

OFFENSE New Mexico State's top three quarterbacks from last season have all transferred out. The Aggies will likely rotate players at the position throughout the year unless one emerges as the clear leader in fall camp. Kentucky transfer Deuce Hogan and junior college transfers Parker Awad and Brandon Nunez will all get a shot.

Aside from the quarterback spot, New Mexico State actually has quite a bit of returning experience on the offensive side of the ball, although the transfer of second-leading receiver Trent Hudson is a blow. Veteran running back Monte Watkins is back after compiling 572 rushing yards last season. He'll have the benefit of veteran blocking from a group that includes All-CUSA left tackle Shiyazh Pete and former UTSA transfer Cedric Claiborne.

DEFENSE For new defensive coordinator Joe Morris, the primary task will be replacing the production of All-CUSA defensive tackle Sterling Webb, now at Missouri. The Aggies also need to replace their three leading tacklers from last season — around 250 tackles worth of production.

The Aggies desperately need to improve their defense against the pass. NMSU was second-to-last in Conference USA in that category in 2023, allowing 250.9 passing yards per game. Incoming transfer safeties Nick Session (Oklahoma State) and Josiah Cox (Arizona State) should be able to help in that department.

SPECIALISTS The Aggies need to replace CUSA's best kicker from last year in Ethan Albertson. Redshirt junior Carson Zilmer kicked off for the Aggies before, so he could return to that role. Senior Jorge Figueroa is also on the roster and was one of the West Coast's best juco kickers in 2021 with 80 points in 11 games.

Punting duties will revert back to grad student George Eberle. Eberle filled the role late in the 2022 season and put two of his three punts inside the opposing 20 that year. His contributions helped the Aggies to a five-point win in the 2022 Quick Lane Bowl.

FINAL ANALYSIS New Mexico State under former head coach Jerry Kill was in the strongest position that the program had been in six decades. Tony Sanchez has the unenviable task of maintaining that momentum without many of the players who created it.

The team New Mexico State does have shows the potential to reach a bowl game for the third year in a row — a feat the school has never achieved — if a number of young players and transfers can step up and take on key roles for the Aggies. However, another 10-win season feels like a pipe dream.

2023 RESULTS (10-5, 7-1 CUSA)

Aug. 26	Massachusetts	L	30-41
Sept. 2	Western Illinois	W	58-21
Sept. 9	at Liberty	L	17-33
Sept. 16	at New Mexico	W	27-17
Sept. 23	at Hawaii	L	17-20
Oct. 4	FIU	W	34-17
Oct. 11	Sam Houston	W	27-13
Oct. 18	at UTEP	W	28-7
Oct. 24	at Louisiana Tech	W	27-24
Nov. 4	Middle Tennessee	W	13-7
Nov. 11	at WKU	W	38-29
Nov. 18	at Auburn	W	31-10
Nov. 25	Jacksonville State	W	20-17
Dec. 1	at Liberty #	L	35-49
Dec. 16	vs. Fresno State %	L	10-37

#C-USA Championship %New Mexico Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	SE Missouri St.
Sept. 7	Liberty
Sept. 14	at Fresno State
Sept. 21	at Sam Houston
Sept. 28	New Mexico
Oct. 9	at Jacksonville St.
Oct. 15	Louisiana Tech
Oct. 29	at FIU
Nov. 9	WKU
Nov. 16	at Texas A&M
Nov. 23	at Middle Tenn.
Nov. 30	UTEP

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Jake Waltman, OL ★★★
2. Alex Lines, TE ★★★
3. Enzo Tayou, DL ★★★
4. Izeyah Wright, WR ★★★
5. Brec Long, TE ★★★
6. Hayden Harlan, OT ★★★
7. TJ Pride, WR ★★★
8. Brandon Nunez, QB ★★★
9. Henry Davis, DL ★★★
10. Desmin Rushton, CB ★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tony Sanchez • Record at School: First season Career Record: 20-40 (5 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Andrew Mitchell, Tyler Wright • Defensive Coordinator: Joe Morris • Location: Las Cruces, N.M. • Stadium: Aggie Memorial Stadium (28,853)

Monte Watkins

Meg Potter/Sun-News

SCOUTING THE AGGIES

"Everyone's gone; they could be the worst in the league this year. You could build out an entire roster and coaching staff out of the guys that aren't there from last season. This program could be a poster child for the have-nots of portal culture being punished for success, when you see Jerry Kill and his QB moving across the country to the SEC a year after beating Auburn. Once the school and Kill got sideways with each other, that was pretty much it. Even in a thin league like this one, I'd expect them to take a pretty big step back. Tony Sanchez is a solid coach who was there last year, but he can't work a miracle with personnel."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	17	Donovan Faupel (So.)	81	Allen Ortiz (Sr.)
WR	11	**KORDELL DAVID (SR.)**	0	PJ Johnson III (Jr.)
WR	21	Isaiah Abeyta (So.)	12	Jordan Smith (Sr.)
LT	71	**SHIYAZH PETE (JR.)**	77	Jacob Golden (Sr.)
LG	51	**AJ VAIPULU (JR.)**	55	Shamarr Jackson (Jr.)
C	56	**CANAAN YARRO (SR.)**	50	Cooper Sheehan (So.)
RG	66	**LOUIE CANEPA (SO.)**	55	Shamarr Jackson (Jr.)
RT	78	**CEDRIC CLAIBORNE (SR.)**	77	Jacob Golden (Sr.)
TE	88	Trevor Stephens (Jr.)	85	Alex Lines (Jr.)
QB	2	Deuce Hogan (Sr.)	10	Brandon Nuñez (Jr.)
RB	8	Monte Watkins (Jr.)	4	Mike Washington (Jr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	42	Noah Arinze (Jr.)	53	Tobin Hackett (Jr.)
DT		Matt Lawson (Sr.)	95	Gabe Jones (Fr.)
DT	43	Naki Fahina (Sr.)	9	Denver Warren (Jr.)
DE		Justin Beadles (Jr.)	53	Tobin Hackett (Jr.)
OLB	40	**BUDDHA PELETI (JR.)**	28	Jaden Robinson (So.)
ILB	14	**SONE AUPIU (SO.)**	45	Quincy Davis (So.)
OLB	35	Tyler Martinez (Jr.)	53	Tobin Hackett (Jr.)
CB	23	Josiah Charles (So.)	29	Rashad McKinley (So.)
CB	7	Keonte Glinton (Sr.)	39	Isaac Gallegos (Jr.)
S	11	Dylan Early (Sr.)	0	Josiah Cox (So.)
S	5	Nick Session (Sr.)	10	DaMarco Moorer (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	95	Jorge Figueroa (Sr.)	KR 12	Jordan Smith (Sr.)
P	92	George Eberle (Sr.)	PR 12	Jordan Smith (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Ife Adeyi

Maria Lysaker-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE BEARKATS

"They were better than their record last year and ended up playing pretty decent football at times, like the Liberty game. They just got beat down early with a hard schedule, and by the time they got into conference play, it was like a case of shell shock. The defense is pretty good on film; they kept them in most games. If they can find a quarterback from the portal, this could be a bounce-back year. Offense is really what kept them back last season. This is basically a transition roster to the FBS, and they've never quit or looked like they couldn't handle CUSA football. If they can fix the offense, there's no reason they couldn't get to six wins."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	11	Malik Phillips (Sr.)	16	Jyzaiah Rockwell (So.)
WR	2	**IFE ADEYI (SR.)**	15	Shane Johnson (Jr.)
WR	6	**NOAH SMITH (SR.)**	9	Simeon Evans (Jr.)
LT	59	**GRACESON JACKSON-SMITH (JR.)**	78	Orion Irving (So.)
LG	73	**MARKENDRICK BEALL (SR.)**	75	William McCollum (Sr.)
C	57	**ETHAN HAGLER (SR.)**	69	Seth Kohlscheen (Sr.)
RG	71	**JAMES DAWN II (JR.)**	58	Will Hutchens (Fr.)
RT	70	Rhett Larson (So.)	79	Kolt Dieterich (Fr.)
TE	86	Thomas Jewett (So.)	89	Fernando Garza (Jr.)
QB	5	Grant Gunnell (Sr.)	8	Jase Bauer (Jr.)
RB	1	**JOHN GENTRY (JR.)**	0	Zach Hrbacek (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	1	**JEVON LEON (SR.)**	44	Briceon Hayes (Jr.)
DT	96	Matthew Aribisala (Jr.)	0	Chris Murray (Jr.)
DT	93	Seth Mason (Sr.)	97	Dylan Frazier (So.)
JACK	18	Issiah Nixon (Sr.)	42	Ca'lub Holloway (So.)
MLB	6	Trey Fields (Jr.)	37	Kason Tullos (Sr.)
OLB	14	**KAVIAN GAITHER (SR.)**	8	Sincere Jackson (Sr.)
CB	7	Emon Allen (Jr.)	12	Tyler Bailey (So.)
CB	5	**DAVID FISHER (JR.)**	20	Chanston Prox (So.)
NB	3	**CALEB WEAVER (JR.)**	24	Elias Escobar (Sr.)
SS	22	Jaidan Scott (So.)	24	Elias Escobar (Sr.)
FS	13	Jaylon Jimmerson (Sr.)	2	Da'Veawn Armstead (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	47	Colby Sessums (Jr.)	KR	11 Malik Phillips (Sr.)
P	43	Jadon Cardell (Jr.)	PR	7 Emon Allen (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

SAM HOUSTON BEARKATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 116 | CUSA PREDICTION: 5 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 CUSA

OFFENSE Sam Houston was only one point shy of having the worst scoring offense in Conference USA last season (240 points). At 19.6 points per game, the Bearkats ranked No. 111 in FBS in 2023.

Helping head coach K.C. Keeler's team to correct that this shortcoming will be a new starting quarterback. Grad student Grant Gunnell played in one game last season but has starting experience from his stops at North Texas and Arizona. There's also a pair of redshirt junior transfers in juco national champion Hunter Watson and Central Michigan backup Jase Bauer. Leading receiver Noah Smith returns after 79 catches for 783 yards with six touchdowns, and Ife Adeyi returns from injury, which should help whoever wins the job.

An average of 2.9 yards per carry doesn't cut it in FBS. In turn, a better running game would take pressure off the passing game and help improve 2023's anemic third-down conversion rate of 36 percent. The offensive line returns almost intact and should be another year wiser and stronger.

DEFENSE Linebacker Trevor Williams and strong safety Da'Marcus Crosby earned first-team All-CUSA nods in 2023, but Williams is off to the pros, and Crosby is in the transfer portal. Potentially replacing Crosby will be intriguing Liberty transfer safety Jaylon Jimmerson, who was a rotational player in the Flames' Fiesta Bowl run last year. Redshirt senior Da'Veawn Armstead also has potential after sitting out most of 2023. This unit allowed 231.5 yards per game through the air last season, ranking near the top of the league in that category, but will need to be stout again with games against UCF and Hawaii on the calendar.

There's plenty of experience in the front seven. Outside linebacker Kavian Gaither returns for a fourth season after posting 70-plus tackles each of the last two seasons. Grad student Seth Mason will likely see an increased role at tackle alongside newly signed SMU transfer Dylan Frazier. That group will obviously be trying to generate more than 17 sacks this season, which put them near the bottom in FBS in the category.

SPECIALISTS Redshirt junior Colby Sessums will return as Sam Houston's primary kicker in 2024. He connected on 27-of-28 PATs and 11-of-14 field-goal attempts, including a dramatic game-winner over Kennesaw State. Punter Jadon Cardell also returns as a redshirt junior after booting 10 punts of 50-plus yards last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's easy to look at the 2023 record and say that the program wasn't ready for the move to FBS. However, that might not be fair considering they lost five one-score games. The Bearkats have veterans who know how to win, but the new additions need to add enough, particularly on offense, to pull out a few more of those close battles.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Rice
Sept. 7	at UCF
Sept. 14	Hawaii
Sept. 21	New Mexico St.
Sept. 28	Texas State
Oct. 3	at UTEP
Oct. 16	WKU
Oct. 22	at FIU
Oct. 29	Louisiana Tech
Nov. 16	at Kennesaw St.
Nov. 23	at Jacksonville St.
Nov. 30	Liberty

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 CUSA)

Sept. 2	at BYU	L	0-14
Sept. 9	Air Force	L	3-13
Sept. 23	at Houston	L	7-38
Sept. 28	Jacksonville St. (ot)	L	28-35
Oct. 5	at Liberty	L	16-21
Oct. 11	at New Mexico State	L	13-27
Oct. 18	FIU (ot)	L	27-33
Oct. 25	UTEP	L	34-37
Nov. 4	Kennesaw State	W	24-21
Nov. 11	at Louisiana Tech	W	42-27
Nov. 18	at WKU	L	23-28
Nov. 25	Middle Tennessee	W	23-20

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Fatu Mukuba, ATH	★★★
2.	Marcus Field, WR	★★★
3.	Hunter Watson, QB	★★★
4.	Dravon Wilson, CB	★★★
5.	Dean Ford, LB	★★★
6.	Michael Phoenix, WR	★★★
7.	Railyn Adams, ATH	★★★
8.	DJ Bailey, QB	★★★
9.	Cooper Stevens, TE	★★★
10.	Josiah Stephens, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: K.C. Keeler • Record at School: 88-36 (10 years) • Career Record: 262-109-1 (30 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Brad Cornelsen • Defensive Coordinator: Skyler Cassity • Location: Huntsville, Texas
Stadium: Elliott T. Bowers Stadium (14,000)

UTEP MINERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 131 | CUSA PREDICTION: 9 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 CUSA

OFFENSE There's been a roster overhaul in El Paso. Former FCS Austin Peay head coach Scotty Walden took over the Miners this offseason, bringing 11 transfers from his old team — nine of them on offense — with him and signing 47 new players in all. One of those transfers is quarterback Skyler Locklear, who, despite limited game experience, is a candidate for the starting job. The other candidate is redshirt junior Cade McConnell, who played in seven games for UTEP last season.

At running back, another Austin Peay transfer will hope to be a major contributor. Jevon Jackson ran for more than 1,300 yards under Walden last season. He'll face a big jump in competition, but he'll try to replace the production of UTEP's two very good departed running backs. TCU transfer Corey Wren could also be a factor.

Getting all the new pieces to fit with the old and implementing Walden's system with a group that's hungry but largely inexperienced will be the overarching storyline of this offense this fall.

DEFENSE Linebacker/defensive end Maurice Westmoreland is UTEP's only returning player who made the All-Conference USA first team in 2023. The Houston native had 7.5 sacks and 10.5 tackles for a loss with 37 total tackles in 2023. After losing highly productive starters Tyrice Knight at linebacker and Praise Amaewhule at end, hanging on to Westmoreland is a coup for the UTEP defense. That unit had a very respectable 26 sacks last season.

However, as is usually the case with coaching changes these days, the cupboard is rather bare in terms of other established defensive playmakers. That doesn't mean there are no prospects, however. Intriguing transfer linebackers Dorian Hopkins (Tulsa) and Dylan Brown-Turner (Florida State) could greatly impact a defense that allowed 6.1 yards per play in 2023. Redshirt junior Nate Dyman also reportedly had a strong spring after seeing limited action last season.

SPECIALISTS The punting job is open, but Aussie Adam Jacklin is a likely candidate after transferring from North Texas, where he punted nine times last year. Placekicker Buzz Flabiano returns after connecting on 10-of-14 field goals in 2023. The Miners could look to redshirt freshman Caden Harris on kickoff and punt return duties.

FINAL ANALYSIS UTEP has one of the more passionate fan bases among Group of 5 programs. Frankly, the Miners are a great match for Walden's energy. However, when you're replacing your starting QB, your best running back and your best defensive player, instant success isn't realistic. Miner fans may have to strap in for a longer rebuild before they get back to consistent postseason contention.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Nebraska
Sept. 7	Southern Utah
Sept. 14	at Liberty
Sept. 21	at Colorado St.
Oct. 3	Sam Houston
Oct. 10	at WKU
Oct. 16	FIU
Oct. 22	at Louisiana Tech
Nov. 2	Middle Tennessee
Nov. 9	Kennesaw State
Nov. 23	at Tennessee
Nov. 30	at New Mexico St.

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 CUSA)

Aug. 26	at Jacksonville St.	L	14-17
Sept. 2	Incarnate Word	W	28-14
Sept. 9	at Northwestern	L	7-38
Sept. 16	at Arizona	L	10-31
Sept. 23	UNLV	L	28-45
Sept. 29	Louisiana Tech	L	10-24
Oct. 11	at FIU	W	27-14
Oct. 18	New Mexico State	L	7-28
Oct. 25	at Sam Houston	W	37-34
Nov. 4	WKU	L	13-21
Nov. 18	at Middle Tennessee	L	30-34
Nov. 25	Liberty	L	28-42

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ashten Emory, RB	★★★
2.	Jaylin Jones, EDGE	★★★
3.	Martavious Collins, TE	★★★
4.	Ekow Taylor, EDGE	★★★
5.	Stratton Shufelt, LB	★★★
6.	Trace Meadows, LB	★★★
7.	Elijah Baldwin, EDGE	★★★
8.	Wondame Davis, QB	★★★
9.	Michael Ray, S	★★★
10.	Luka Matamoros, OT	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Scotty Walden • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 34-20 (6 years)
Offensive Coordinators: Jake Brown, Ryan Stanchek • Defensive Coordinator: J.J. Clark • Location: El Paso, Texas
Stadium: Sun Bowl (51,500)

AJ Odums

SCOUTING THE MINERS

"No one in the league is sure what to expect here yet, but the head coach [Scotty Walden] has a reputation for being a maniac, in a good way. It's an uphill battle recruiting to El Paso, but he seems to want to embrace that and change the brand out there. They left the spring with last year's starter [Cade McConnell] looking pretty good in the new system. They want to go fast and play with tempo in a way that doesn't fit the old staff at all. ... So far, it seems like they're fighting hard for portal guys and trying to re-work the high school recruiting relationships. If that guy is a maniac, he's at the perfect place to go at it like there's nothing to lose."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	8	Emari White (Jr.)	0	Ashton Nickelberry (Jr.)
WR	12	Javoni Gardere (So.)	1	Trey Goodman (Sr.)
LT	65	Isaiah Wright (Sr.)	58	Jaquan Toney (Jr.)
LG	60	Joseph Immediato (Jr.)	59	Otis Pitts III (Sr.)
C	53	Ivan Escobar (Jr.)	56	Luis Carlos Aranda (So.)
RG	50	Brennan Smith (Jr.)	59	Otis Pitts III (Sr.)
RT	74	Azizi Henry (So.)	75	Juan Camacho Jr. (Jr.)
TE	82	Marcus Vinson (Jr.)	88	Luke Seib (So.)
QB	11	**CADE MCCONNELL (JR.)**	9	Skyler Locklear (So.)
RB	24	Mike Franklin (Sr.)	4	Jevon Jackson (Jr.)
FB	43	**JULIAN LOPEZ (SR.)**	17	Judah Ezinwa (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	0	**MAURICE WESTMORELAND (SR.)**	15	Bryton Thompson (Sr.)
DT	99	Sione Tonga'uiha (Sr.)	90	RaQuan Thompson (Sr.)
DT	98	Logologo Va'a (So.)	92	Quinzavious Warren (Jr.)
DE	7	KD Johnson (Sr.)	32	Devin Goree (Sr.)
OLB	5	Tray Dunson (Sr.)	30	Nate Dyman (Jr.)
ILB	42	Jake Hall (Sr.)	41	Dorian Hopkins (Sr.)
CB	14	Amier Boyd-Matthews (So.)	18	John Burris III (So.)
CB	1	**AJ ODUMS (SR.)**	16	Yessman Green (Sr.)
NB	22	**JOSIAH ALLEN (SR.)**	21	Stefan Cameron (Sr.)
SS	11	Oscar Moore (Sr.)	6	Kory Chapman (Sr.)
FS	21	Stefan Cameron (Sr.)	26	Lantz Russell (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	36	Buzz Flabiano (So.)	KR	19	Caden Harris (Fr.)
P	29	Adam Jacklin (Fr.)	PR	19	Caden Harris (Fr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Ivan Pierre Aguirre-USA TODAY Sports

Dalvin Smith

SCOUTING THE HILLTOPPERS

"If you had to pick one team other than Liberty in the league, it's probably these guys, at least in terms of talent. They kind of got a head start on the modern portal culture by bringing in the Houston Baptist coach and players a few seasons back. They're defined by how good they are at the moment and nothing else, because they've gambled on one-year fixes for a while now. [Quarterback] TJ Finley can do that for them again this year; he makes them better than just about everyone else outside of Liberty or Jacksonville State on offense. They added [Will] Friend as the OC, which shows the blueprint there — they have a lot of staffers tied in with SEC programs, so they can stay ahead of the league grabbing transfers."

— An opposing CUSA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	17	**DALVIN SMITH (SR.)**	18	Moussa Barry (So.)
WR	13	Kisean Johnson (Sr.)	8	Easton Messer (So.)
WR	4	Michael Mathison (Sr.)	15	K.D. Hutchinson (So.)
LT	53	**MARSHALL JACKSON (JR.)**	77	Melvin Collins Jr. (Jr.)
LG	78	**QUANTAVIOUS LESLIE (SR.)**	65	Rodney Newsom Jr. (So.)
C	58	Evan Wibberley (So.)	72	Colten Cable (Sr.)
RG	50	**WESLEY HORTON (JR.)**	62	Michael Moment (Sr.)
RT	71	Stacey Wilkins (Sr.)	74	Michael Ondelacy (Sr.)
TE	87	**RIVER HELMS (JR.)**	86	Trevor Borland (Sr.)
QB	16	TJ Finley (Jr.)	10	Caden Veltkamp (So.)
RB	3	**ELIJAH YOUNG (SR.)**	7	LT Sanders (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	95	Deante McCray (So.)	92	Marcus Patterson (So.)
DT	98	**HOSEA WHEELER (JR.)**	94	Jayden Loving (Jr.)
DT	91	Jalil Rivera-Harvey (Sr.)	13	Terrion Thompson (Sr.)
JACK	59	Sebastian Benjamin (Sr.)	32	**KYLAN GUIDRY (SR.)**
MLB	23	Rashion Hodge (Sr.)	12	Chandler Matthews (Sr.)
OLB	51	Devon Lynch (Sr.)	31	Anthony Brackenridge (Jr.)
CB	21	**UPTON STOUT (JR.)**	24	Denzil Alleyne (Sr.)
CB	4	**ANTHONY JOHNSON (SR.)**	10	Jaymar Mundy (Jr.)
NB	19	**VIRGIL MARSHALL (JR.)**	28	Ely George (Jr.)
SS	15	Demarko Williams (Jr.)	14	Devonte Matthews (Sr.)
FS	11	Kent Robinson (Jr.)	41	Alex Ford (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	17	Lucas Carneiro (So.)	KR	8 Easton Messer (So.)
P	99	Riley Stephens (Sr.)	PR	8 Easton Messer (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Jim Dedmon-USA TODAY Sports

WKU HILLTOPPERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 84 | CUSA PREDICTION: 2 | 2023 RECORD: 8-5, 5-3 CUSA

OFFENSE Unsurprisingly, WKU's success will be largely determined by quarterback play. TJ Finley transferred from Texas State this offseason after breaking a program record by throwing for 3,439 yards last season. However, redshirt sophomore Caden Veltkamp is expected to push for time as well after an MVP-worthy performance in the Famous Toastery Bowl that included five touchdown passes.

Replacing Malachi Corley will be difficult after his 79 catches were 29 more than the next-closest receiver. That receiver was Dalvin Smith, another bowl game hero who caught 50 passes for 513 yards last season with six touchdowns. He's not the same type of player as Corley, but his 6-foot-3 frame makes him a very attractive target in the red zone.

Securing the pocket will be mission critical as always for the guys up front. The Hilltoppers allowed sacks on just 2.5 percent of plays last season — better than any other Group of 5 team. The offensive line will be led by Quantavious Leslie, who enters his fourth year as a starter at WKU. The 6-foot-3, 318-pounder will likely draw some NFL Draft attention in 2025.

DEFENSE Improvement is necessary for the Hilltoppers on defense after they allowed 420 yards and 29 points per game in 2023.

Up front, defensive tackle Hosea Wheeler is a name to watch after 42 tackles earned him second-team All-CUSA honors. Wheeler picked up some game film against Ohio State last year that will likely serve him well, posting a sack, a forced fumble and an interception in that contest.

In the secondary, the Hilltoppers possess plenty of experience in the starting lineup. Cornerback Anthony Johnson will be one of the best defenders in CUSA. Redshirt junior Upton Stout will once again be an important piece of the puzzle. He led the team in pass breakups last season with eight. At safety, Ole Miss transfer Demarko Williams will likely start after being a hard-hitting rotational piece in the SEC for two years.

SPECIALISTS Receiver Easton Messer was All-CUSA honorable mention last season after averaging 22.2 yards per return. Kicker Lucas Carneiro was also honorable mention after going a perfect 47-for-47 on PATs. Punting duties will fall to Cole Maynard or Riley Stephens, both of whom are transfers.

FINAL ANALYSIS Tyson Helton's club will once again have championship aspirations. But instead of relying on their ability to make huge plays when their backs are against the wall, the Hilltoppers need to avoid being against the wall at all. They can do that by getting the defense off the field

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Alabama
Sept. 7	Eastern Kentucky
Sept. 14	at Middle Tenn.
Sept. 21	Toledo
Sept. 28	at Boston College
Oct. 10	UTEP
Oct. 16	at Sam Houston
Oct. 30	Kennesaw State
Nov. 9	at New Mexico St.
Nov. 16	Louisiana Tech
Nov. 23	at Liberty
Nov. 30	Jacksonville St.

2023 RESULTS (8-5, 5-3 CUSA)

Sept. 2	South Florida	W	41-24
Sept. 9	Houston Christian	W	52-22
Sept. 16	at Ohio State	L	10-63
Sept. 23	at Troy	L	24-27
Sept. 28	Middle Tennessee	W	31-10
Oct. 5	at Louisiana Tech	W	35-28
Oct. 17	at Jacksonville St.	L	17-20
Oct. 24	Liberty	L	29-42
Nov. 4	at UTEP	W	21-13
Nov. 11	New Mexico State	L	29-38
Nov. 18	Sam Houston	W	28-23
Nov. 25	at FIU	W	41-28
Dec. 18	vs. Old Dominion#(ot)	W	38-35

#Famous Toastery Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Chukwunedu Okeke, DL ★★★
2. Jaylen Hampton, WR ★★★
3. Tucker Parks, QB ★★★
4. Tate Titshaw, RB ★★★
5. Harper Holloman, DL ★★★
6. Cameron Flowers, ATH ★★★
7. Xavion Griffin, S ★★★
8. Gabriel Arnold, OT ★★★
9. Rodney Tisdale Jr., QB ★★★
10. Melvin Collins, OL ★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tyson Helton • Record at School: 40-26 (5 years) • Career Record: 40-26 (5 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Will Friend • Defensive Coordinator: Tyson Summers • Location: Bowling Green, Ky.
Stadium: Houchens Industries L.T. Smith Stadium (22,113)

UCONN HUSKIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 124 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9

OFFENSE Like many of its peers in the Group of 5 in 2024, UConn needs to find replacements for several of its top players from the 2023 season, including its quarterback. Ta'Quan Roberson was the full-time starter in 2023, throwing for 2,075 yards with 12 touchdown passes and six interceptions and adding two rushing touchdowns, but he entered the portal in the offseason. Expect FCS Maine transfer Joe Fagnano to push for the job along with Wisconsin transfer Nick Evers.

All-America guard Christian Haynes needs to be replaced. Former Michigan signee Jack Stewart is a candidate to do so after appearing in 11 games last season, but it will likely take a village to make the line successful. The Huskies were one of the best pass-blocking teams in football in 2023, allowing only 12 total sacks.

UConn also has the unfortunate task of replacing tight end Justin Joly, now at NC State. Joly was the Huskies' leading receiver last season with 578 yards. However, Wisconsin transfer wide receiver Skyler Bell could fill the production void nicely. Bell caught 69 passes for 755 yards and six touchdowns in two seasons for the Badgers.

DEFENSE New defensive coordinator Matt Brock is expected to move the Huskies to a 3-3-5 scheme, which he had some success with at Mississippi State. It's a move that adds a bit more pressure to defensive tackles Pryce Yates and Jelani Stafford, who combined for 22 tackles for a loss last season. Stafford also made a name for himself on offense, picking up six rushing touchdowns as a 300-pound situational running back.

Brock is the team's first full-time defensive coordinator since Jim Mora became head coach in 2022, which adds stability to the group.

UConn will also need to replace arguably their most consistent player in linebacker Jackson Mitchell after three consecutive seasons with more than 100 tackles. Mitchell finishes his NCAA career at No. 29 on the FBS all-time list with 432 total tackles. Finding a performer in the middle who can live up to that standard will not be easy.

SPECIALISTS The Huskies will have new faces at both kicker and punter in 2024. Grad transfer placekicker Chris Freeman joins the Huskies from Indiana, where he was 10-for-14 on field goals in 2023 and 29-of-30 on extra points. Punter Connor Stutz joins from FCS Sacramento State, where he booted it just 10 times in 26 games for 45.6 yards per punt.

FINAL ANALYSIS Mora has already won more games in two years than his predecessor did in four, not counting the canceled 2020 schedule. Now, it's a matter of how he and his staff can adjust to the current state of college football, which Mora has been critical of in the last calendar year.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Maryland
Sept. 7	Merrimack
Sept. 14	at Duke
Sept. 21	Florida Atlantic
Sept. 28	Buffalo
Oct. 5	Temple
Oct. 19	Wake Forest
Oct. 26	Rice
Nov. 2	Georgia State
Nov. 9	at UAB
Nov. 23	at Syracuse
Nov. 30	at Massachusetts

2023 RESULTS (3-9)

Aug. 31	NC State	L	14-24
Sept. 9	at Georgia State	L	14-35
Sept. 16	FIU	L	17-24
Sept. 23	Duke	L	7-41
Sept. 30	Utah State	L	33-34
Oct. 7	at Rice	W	38-31
Oct. 21	South Florida	L	21-24
Oct. 28	at Boston College	L	14-21
Nov. 4	at Tennessee	L	3-59
Nov. 11	at James Madison	L	6-44
Nov. 18	Sacred Heart	W	31-3
Nov. 25	at Massachusetts	W	31-18

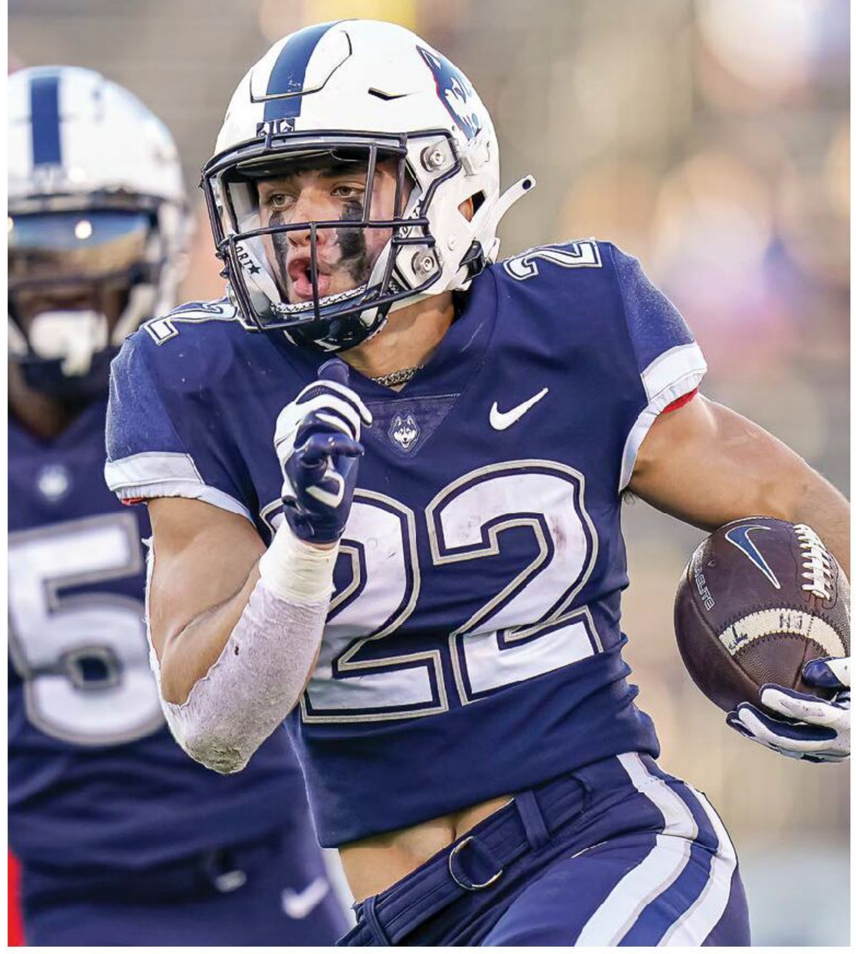
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Cole Welliver, QB	★★★
2.	Dominic Toy, TE	★★★
3.	Deron McLaughlin, OT	★★★
4.	Terrence Smith, WR	★★★
5.	Cooper Ackerman, DL	★★★
6.	Oliver Lundberg Coleman, RB	★★★
7.	Diego Rodriguez, OT	★★★
8.	Kaleb Stewart, LB	★★★
9.	Clemens Richter, TE	★★★
10.	Jon Morris, S	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jim Mora • Record at School: 9-16 (2 years) • Career Record: 55-46 (8 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Nick Charlton • Defensive Coordinator: Matt Brock • Location: Storrs, Conn.
Stadium: Pratt & Whitney Stadium at Rentschler Field (40,642)



Victor Rosa

SCOUTING THE HUSKIES

"They weren't as bad as 3-9 last year, but it's a really hard place to win games in the margins. They have two good QBs entering the year, but they've struggled to keep that position healthy. Hiring [defensive coordinator Matt] Brock was a great move for [head coach Jim] Mora; now he's got a guy calling the defense, and he can focus on the team. Brock is a really sharp defensive mind coming from the SEC, so that can help. They're shifting to a 3-3-5, and they'll mix a lot of looks in. ... As long as they're independent, it's going to be a pretty miserable gig. Mora's not the easiest guy to like, but he wasn't wrong about the boosters not helping with NIL."

— An opposing assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	5	Skyler Bell (Jr.)		TJ Sheffield (Jr.)
WR	10	**BRETT BUCKMAN (SR.)**	4	Jasaiah Gathings (Jr.)
WR	8	Dajon Harrison (Jr.)	18	Kylish Hicks (So.)
LT	71	**VALENTIN SENN (SR.)**	79	Danny Anotolovich (Jr.)
LG	58	Kyle Juergens (Jr.)	78	Carsten Casady (Fr.)
C	67	Christopher Fortin (Sr.)	73	Wes Hoeh (Jr.)
RG	70	Jack Stewart (Sr.)	66	Brady Wayburn (Fr.)
RT	75	**CHASE LUNDT (SR.)**	77	Ben Murawski (So.)
TE	86	Alex Honig (Jr.)	14	**NICK HARRIS (SR.)**
QB	2	Joe Fagnano (Sr.)		Nick Evers (So.)
RB	0	Cam Edwards (Jr.)	22	Victor Rosa (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DT	90	**PRYCE YATES (JR.)**	19	Langston Hardy (So.)
NT	96	**DAL'MONT GOURDINE (SR.)**	99	Jayden Simon (Sr.)
DT	97	**JELANI STAFFORD (SR.)**	92	Timothy Passmore Jr. (So.)
DE	33	Kervins Choute (Jr.)	94	Matt Hoffman (So.)
OLB	23	Alfred Chea (Sr.)	12	Amir Renwick (Sr.)
MLB	5	Aaron Key (Sr.)	31	Kalen Villanueva (Jr.)
OLB	15	**TUI FAUMUINA-BROWN (SR.)**	24	Julien Simon (Jr.)
CB	14	Malcolm Bell (Jr.)	3	D'Mon Brinson (Jr.)
CB	11	Isiah Davis (So.)	22	Reggie Akles (Sr.)
SS	2	**RANTE JONES (SR.)**	21	Lee Molette III (Jr.)
FS	1	**MALIK DIXON-WILLIAMS (SR.)**	4	**Stan Cross (Sr.)**

SPECIALISTS

K	28	Chris Freeman (Sr.)	KR	28	Bryan Domino (So.)
P	17	Connor Stutz (Jr.)	PR	28	Bryan Domino (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

David Butler II-USA TODAY Sports

Taisun Phommachanh

SCOUTING THE MINUTEMEN

"If you have the right perspective, they're in better shape than most years. ... They don't have a quarterback settled in the spring because of injuries, they don't have a full roster after spring ball and they're going to have to go hard in the portal to fill spots. They lack size, and they're worse than a lot of FCS programs, but Don [Brown] is a hell of a coach, and they looked better on tape last season than any of us can remember. ... The good news is that they can now recruit to the MAC and play a consistent schedule that helps them get in front of players. Give that staff a few years recruiting in that league, and they can get them out of obscurity."

— An opposing assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	7	Frank Ladson Jr. (Sr.)	12	Sam Staruch (Jr.)
WR	1	**ANTHONY SIMPSON (SR.)**	11	Jakobie Keeney-James (Sr.)
WR	4	Sterling Galban (Sr.)	6	Keshawn Brown (Jr.)
LT	63	Brayden Rohme (Sr.)	65	Luke Painton (Sr.)
LG	77	Mao Glynn II (Jr.)	66	Wyatt Terlaak (Jr.)
C	60	**JOSH ATWOOD (SR.)**	55	Zachary Anderson (Fr.)
RG	57	Paul Tchio (Jr.)	64	Peyton Miller (Fr.)
RT	72	**ETHAN MOTTINGER (SR.)**	79	Ryan Mosesso (Jr.)
TE	81	Dominick Mazotti (Sr.)	0	Jaelyn Lay (Sr.)
QB	3	**TAISUN PHOMMACHANH (SR.)**	5	Ahmad Haston (Fr.)
RB	21	Jalen John (Jr.)	30	Cookie Desiderio (Fr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	18	**LOUCE JULIEN (JR.)**	10	Zukudo Igwenagu (Sr.)
DT	44	Aaron Beckwith (Jr.)	49	Shambre Jackson (Jr.)
DT	19	Etinosa Reuben (Sr.)	98	Tim Grant-Randall (Sr.)
DE	13	Jaylen Hudson (Sr.)	50	Aquan Robinson (Jr.)
OLB	22	**GERRELL JOHNSON (SR.)**	9	Myles Turner (Jr.)
ILB	23	Jalen Stewart (Sr.)	15	Derrieon Craig (Jr.)
OLB	5	Tyler Martin (So.)	40	Dominic Schofield (Jr.)
CB	7	Lake Ellis (Sr.)	14	Ryan Barnes (Jr.)
CB	2	**ISAIAH RUTHERFORD (SR.)**	12	Brennen Bailey (So.)
SS	21	**TE'RAI POWELL (SR.)**	6	Jeremiah McGill (So.)
FS	4	**TYLER RUDOLPH (SR.)**	8	Jashon Watkins (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	95	CJ Kolodziey (Sr.)	KR	1 Anthony Simpson (Sr.)
P	98	Riley Moore (Jr.)	PR	1 Anthony Simpson (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Matthew O'Haren-USA TODAY Sports

UMASS MINUTEMEN

NATIONAL FORECAST: 125 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9

OFFENSE The most exciting player on this Minutemen team last year, running back Kay'Ron Lynch-Adams, transferred to Michigan State in the offseason, leaving a big gap in the offensive attack.

Quarterback Taisun Phommachanh had his moments last season, particularly in the first few weeks. In last year's season-opening win over New Mexico State, the ex-Clemson and ex-Georgia Tech QB threw for 192 yards and rushed for 96. However, there just weren't enough performances like that. Perhaps new offensive coordinator and ex-James Madison play-caller Shane Montgomery can unlock Phommachanh's potential.

There is reason to be optimistic about the wide receiver group. Head coach Don Brown's staff signed a handful of veterans at the position, including FCS Eastern Washington's Jakobie Keeney-James and former top-50 recruit Frank Ladson Jr. Ladson started nine games for Miami over the past two years and made 30 appearances at Clemson prior to that.

DEFENSE Simply put, the Minutemen have to get better on defense after allowing 37.8 points per game, worst in FBS. They were especially bad at defending the run, allowing an FBS-worst 5.9 yards per rush last season. Opposing teams barely felt the need to throw the ball, averaging 23.8 pass attempts per game. If opponents can move the ball that quickly without even needing to throw, the secondary will have clean uniforms at the end of the day, if nothing else.

In the middle, the transfer additions of defensive linemen Etinosa Reuben (Georgia Tech/Clemson), Jaylen Hudson (Wake Forest) and Tim Grant-Randall (Eastern Michigan) could revitalize a pass rush that produced only 19 sacks in 2023.

SPECIALISTS Senior placekicker CJ Kolodziey returns after handling punting and kickoff duties each of the last two seasons. He averaged a little more than 41 yards per punt last season. Senior Anthony Simpson will head up a kick return unit that averaged 17.8 yards per return last season. He was an All-Independent selection in 2023 by Phil Steele and College Football Network. Riley Moore, who was used sparingly as a punter last season, could see his role increase in some capacity. Moore has also been a placekicker at previous stops in college, namely FCS Weber State.

FINAL ANALYSIS Given this program's history at the FBS level, 2024 isn't about contending for the postseason. It's more about showing that the program can go a year without backsliding, as well as gauging how competitive the Minutemen can be upon their entrance into the Mid-American Conference in 2025. Recording the program's first four-win season since 2018 would be, frankly, a substantial victory.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Eastern Michigan
Sept. 7	at Toledo
Sept. 14	at Buffalo
Sept. 21	C. Connecticut St.
Sept. 28	at Miami (Ohio)
Oct. 5	at N. Illinois
Oct. 12	Missouri
Oct. 26	Wagner
Nov. 2	at Mississippi St.
Nov. 16	Liberty
Nov. 23	at Georgia
Nov. 30	Connecticut

2023 RESULTS (3-9)

Aug. 26	at New Mexico St.	W	41-30
Sept. 2	at Auburn	L	14-59
Sept. 9	Miami (Ohio)	L	28-41
Sept. 16	at Eastern Michigan	L	17-19
Sept. 23	New Mexico (ot)	L	31-34
Sept. 30	Arkansas State	L	28-52
Oct. 7	Toledo	L	24-41
Oct. 14	at Penn State	L	0-63
Oct. 28	at Army	W	21-14
Nov. 4	Merrimack	W	31-21
Nov. 18	at Liberty	L	25-49
Nov. 25	Connecticut	L	18-31

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kezion Dia-Johnson, WR	★★★★
2.	Jadrian Gibbs, S	★★★
3.	Da'Marion Alberic, ATH	★★★
4.	Tanner Burlingame, OT	★★★
5.	Andre Weeks, OT	★★★
6.	Brahim Wynn, EDGE	★★★
7.	Noah Staples, TE	★★★
8.	Kenyon Massey, WR	★★★
9.	Keith Sarkodieh, CB	★★★
10.	Ludovic Martin, TE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Don Brown • Record at School: 47-39 (7 years) • Career Record: 99-65 (14 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Shane Montgomery • Defensive Coordinator: Keith Dudzinski • Location: Amherst, Mass.
Stadium: McGuirk Alumni Stadium (17,000)

NOTRE DAME FIGHTING IRISH

NATIONAL FORECAST: 9 | 2023 RECORD: 10-3

OFFENSE Notre Dame went through an offensive overhaul this offseason. Despite the turnover, the Irish will field a deeper and more talented unit in 2024, and new offensive coordinator Mike Denbrock has raised expectations. Quarterback Riley Leonard gives Notre Dame a dynamic run-throw option, assuming his ankle can get healthy and stay healthy. Leonard will be surrounded by the best supporting cast of his career.

Dynamic running backs Jeremiyah Love and Jadarian Price help ease the loss of star Audric Estime. If he can return to health, Mitchell Evans will once again be one of the nation's top tight ends. The arrival of transfer wide receivers Kris Mitchell and Beaux Collins and the return of Jaden Greathouse, Jordan Faison and Jayden Thomas should bolster the perimeter.

Notre Dame's biggest question mark is up front, where the Irish must replace three starters, including All-American Joe Alt. Sophomore Charles Jagusah is massive (6-7, 329) and talented, but he's inexperienced.

DEFENSE Year 2 under defensive coordinator Al Golden saw Notre Dame emerge as one of the top defensive units in the nation. Notre Dame finished the 2023 season ranked in the top 10 in scoring defense (seventh), total defense (fifth) and yards allowed per play (fifth), among other categories. Notre Dame returns five starters from that unit, including All-Americans Xavier Watts at safety and Howard Cross III at defensive tackle.

Watts and cornerback Benjamin Morrison are arguably the top safety-cornerback tandem in the country, but the success of the secondary will be largely determined by how well Notre Dame can replace the corner spot opposite Morrison and how well transfers Rod Heard II (Northwestern) and Jordan Clark (Arizona State) transition.

Cross and Rylie Mills are as good of an interior duo as Notre Dame has had in a very long time, but the edge is a bit more shaky. Notre Dame must also replace multi-year starters at linebacker, but that is a position the Irish have recruited quite well under head coach Marcus Freeman.

SPECIALISTS Notre Dame will boast a dynamic return tandem with Price and Marshall transfer Jayden Harrison, who averaged 34.4 and 30.7 yards per return last season, respectively. Transfer kicker Mitch Jeter nailed 23-of-25 field goals the last two seasons at South Carolina.

FINAL ANALYSIS Freeman has shown steady progress in his two seasons as head coach, but it is his ability to acquire talent that has raised expectations in South Bend. Now Freeman must show that he can consistently lead the Irish to wins on the biggest stage and get his program to the College Football Playoff.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Texas A&M
Sept. 7	Northern Illinois
Sept. 14	at Purdue
Sept. 21	Miami (Ohio)
Sept. 28	Louisville
Oct. 12	Stanford
Oct. 19	at Georgia Tech#
Oct. 26	vs. Navy %
Nov. 9	Florida State
Nov. 16	Virginia
Nov. 23	vs. Army &
Nov. 30	at USC

#Mercedes-Benz Stadium %East Rutherford, NJ &Bronx, NY

2023 RESULTS (10-3)

Aug. 26	vs. Navy #	W	42-3
Sept. 2	Tennessee State	W	56-3
Sept. 9	at NC State	W	45-24
Sept. 16	Central Michigan	W	41-17
Sept. 23	Ohio State	L	14-17
Sept. 30	at Duke	W	21-14
Oct. 7	at Louisville	L	20-33
Oct. 14	USC	W	48-20
Oct. 28	Pittsburgh	W	58-7
Nov. 4	at Clemson	L	23-31
Nov. 18	Wake Forest	W	45-7
Nov. 25	at Stanford	W	56-23
Dec. 29	vs. Oregon St. %	W	40-8

#Dublin %Sun Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Guery Lambert, OT	★★★★★
2.	Bryce Young, EDGE	★★★★
3.	Cam Williams, WR	★★★★
4.	Kedren Young, RB	★★★★
5.	Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa, LB	★★★★
6.	Anthonie Knapp, OL	★★★★
7.	Micah Gilbert, WR	★★★★
8.	CJ Carr, QB	★★★★
9.	Loghan Thomas, EDGE	★★★★
10.	Styles Prescod, OL	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Marcus Freeman • Record at School: 19-8 (2+ years) • Career Record: 19-8 (2+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Mike Denbrock • Defensive Coordinator: Al Golden • Location: South Bend, Ind.
Stadium: Notre Dame Stadium (77,622)

Xavier Watts

SCOUTING THE FIGHTING IRISH

"Riley Leonard and Mike Dembrock should be a great fit. That offense could be really good; those guys are going to be on the same page, but they need some help on the offensive line, and they don't really have a killer target in the passing game. The offense overall isn't impressive, but a lot can happen with the summer and the portal. ... The defense will carry them. This is Year 3 with the system. This will be the best defense, at least in terms of talent, that Marcus [Freeman] has put out there in three seasons. ... They're a playoff contender if they can work out that offense on the fly. The good news is that the defense is going to keep them in pretty much every game."

— An opposing assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	83	Jayden Thomas (Sr.)	0	Deion Colzie (Sr.)
WR	10	Kris Mitchell (Sr.)		Beaux Collins (Sr.)
WR	19	Jaden Greathouse (So.)	5	Jordan Faison (So.)
LT	56	Charles Jagusah (So.)	75	Sullivan Absher (So.)
LG	78	**PAT COOGAN (SR.)**	50	**ROCCO SPINDLER (SR.)**
C	70	Ashton Craig (Jr.)	72	Sam Pendleton (So.)
RG	74	Billy Schrauth (Jr.)	55	Chris Terek (So.)
RT	79	Tosh Baker (Sr.)	59	Aamil Wagner (Jr.)
TE	88	**MITCHELL EVANS (SR.)**	9	Eli Raridon (Jr.)
QB	13	Riley Leonard (Sr.)	18	Steve Angeli (Jr.)
RB	4	Jeremiyah Love (So.)	24	Jadarian Price (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	9	RJ Oben (Sr.)	40	Joshua Burnham (Jr.)
DT	99	**RYLIE MILLS (SR.)**	41	Donovan Hinish (Jr.)
NT	56	**HOWARD CROSS III (SR.)**	47	Jason Onye (Sr.)
DE	12	**JORDAN BOTELHO (SR.)**	44	Junior Tuihalamaka (Jr.)
LB	24	Jack Kiser (Sr.)	3	Jaylen Sneed (Jr.)
LB	34	Drayk Bowen (So.)	27	Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa (Fr.)
NB	1	Jordan Clark (Sr.)	4	Jaiden Ausberry (So.)
FC	29	Christian Gray (So.)	7	Jaden Mickey (Jr.)
BC	20	**BENJAMIN MORRISON (JR.)**	18	Chance Tucker (Sr.)
BS		Rod Heard II (Sr.)	8	Adon Shuler (So.)
FS	0	**XAVIER WATTS (SR.)**	28	Luke Talich (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	98	Mitch Jeter (Sr.)	KR	2	Jayden Harrison (Sr.)
P	90	Eric Goins (Sr.)	PR	19	Jaden Greathouse (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Matt Cashore-USA TODAY Sports

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Uzo Aduba
Stand Up To Cancer Ambassador

Photo By
Matt Sayles

STAND UP TO CANCER®

Count Me In

Stand Up To Cancer is a division of the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF), a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

MAC PREVIEW

Brett Gabbert, Miami (Ohio)

Jacquez Stuart, Toledo

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1. **MIAMI (OHIO) REDHAWKS**
2. **TOLEDO ROCKETS**
3. **NORTHERN ILLINOIS HUSKIES**
4. **BOWLING GREEN FALCONS**
5. **WESTERN MICHIGAN BRONCOS**
6. **EASTERN MICHIGAN EAGLES**
7. **CENTRAL MICHIGAN CHIPPEWAS**
8. **OHIO BOBCATS**
9. **BALL STATE CARDINALS**
10. **BUFFALO BULLS**
11. **AKRON ZIPS**
12. **KENT STATE FLASHES**

MAC CHAMPIONSHIP

MIAMI (OHIO) OVER TOLEDO

ALL-MAC TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	**Brett Gabbert**	Miami (Ohio)
RB	**Antario Brown**	Northern Illinois
RB	**Jalen Buckley**	Western Michigan
AP	**Terion Stewart**	Bowling Green
WR	**Chrishon McCray**	Kent State
WR	**Kenneth Womack**	Western Michigan
WR	**Jerjuan Newton**	Toledo
TE	**Harold Fannin Jr.**	Bowling Green
C	**Jacob Gideon**	Western Michigan
OL	**Brayden Swartout**	Central Michigan
OL	**Will Jados**	Miami (Ohio)
OL	**Reid Holskey**	Miami (Ohio)
OL	**Addison West**	Western Michigan

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	**CJ Nunnally IV**	Akron
DL	**Brian Ugwu**	Miami (Ohio)
DL	**Darius Alexander**	Toledo
DL	**Raishein Thomas**	Northern Illinois
DL	**Peyton Price**	Eastern Michigan
LB	**Matt Salopek**	Miami (Ohio)
LB	**Ty Wise**	Miami (Ohio)
LB	**Bryan McCoy**	Akron
CB	**Donte Kent**	Central Michigan
CB	**Jordan Oladokun**	Bowling Green
S	**Maxen Hook**	Toledo
S	**Quentavius Scandrett**	Eastern Michigan

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	**Andrew Glass**	Kent State
P	**Mitchell Tomasek**	Eastern Michigan
KR	**Jacquez Stuart**	Toledo
PR	**Cade McDonald**	Miami (Ohio)

For a look at second- and third-team selections, visit *AthlonSports.com*

BOWL PREDICTIONS

68 Ventures: Toledo vs. Arkansas State

Arizona: Central Michigan vs. Colorado State

Bahamas: Eastern Michigan vs. FIU

Camellia: Bowling Green vs. South Alabama

Cure: Miami (Ohio) vs. Memphis

Famous Idaho Potato: Western Michigan vs. Air Force

Quick Lane: Northern Illinois vs. Michigan State

Gabbert: Sam Navarro-USA TODAY Sports; Stuart: Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

GAMES TO WATCH

AUG. 31 Miami (Ohio) at Northwestern

SEPT. 14 Cincinnati at Miami (Ohio)

OCT. 19 Ohio at Miami (Ohio)

OCT. 19 Central Michigan at Eastern Michigan

OCT. 19 Toledo at Northern Illinois

OCT. 5 Miami (Ohio) at Toledo

OCT. 26 Bowling Green at Toledo

OCT. 26 Central Michigan at Miami (Ohio)

NOV. 19 Western Michigan at Central Michigan

NOV. 20 Ohio at Toledo

NOV. 29 Miami (Ohio) at Bowling Green

NOV. 30 Eastern Michigan at Western Michigan

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Toledo (68)
2. Western Michigan (77)
3. Miami (Ohio) (92)
4. Eastern Michigan (97)
5. Ohio (102)
6. Northern Illinois (109)
7. Bowling Green (111)
8. Central Michigan (112)
9. Kent State (117)
10. Buffalo (119)
11. Akron (120)
12. Ball State (124)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

MAC RETURNING LEADERS

PASSING	ATT	COMP	PCT	YDS	TD	INT	AVG/G
Brett Gabbert, Miami (Ohio)	187	111	59.4	1,634	14	5	204.3
Hayden Wolff, W. Michigan	226	148	65.5	1,505	8	5	188.1
Connor Bazelak, Bowling Green	278	168	60.4	1,935	12	7	175.9

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Antario Brown, No. Illinois	212	1,296	6.1	10	80	99.7
Jalen Buckley, W. Michigan	189	1,003	5.3	10	75	91.2
Terion Stewart, Bowling Green	125	762	6.1	8	54	84.7

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Chrishon McCray, Kent State	41	610	14.9	4	42	67.8
Kenneth Womack, W. Michigan	76	691	9.1	1	34	57.6
Harold Fannin Jr., Bowling Green	44	623	14.2	6	56	56.6

DEFENSE

TACKLES
Matt Salopek, Miami (Ohio) (144); Ty Wise, Miami (Ohio) (122)

SACKS
Brian Ugwu, Miami (Ohio) (8.0); Ty Wise, Miami (Ohio) (8.0)

INTERCEPTIONS
Jordan Oladokun, Bowling Green (4); four players tied with 3

COACHING CAROUSEL

AKRON
Offense: New: Joe Moorhead; Old: Billy Fessler

BALL STATE
Offense: New: Jared Elliott; Old: Kevin Lynch, Jared Elliott
Defense: New: Jeff Knowles; Old: Tyler Stockton

BUFFALO
Head Coach: New: Pete Lembo; Old: Maurice Linguist
Offense: New: Dave Patenaude; Old: DJ Mangas
Defense: New: Joe Bowen; Old: Robert Wright

CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Offense: New: Jim McElwain; Old: Paul Petrino

EASTERN MICHIGAN
Offense: New: Mike Piatkowski; Old: Chris Creighton

KENT STATE
Offense: New: Clay Patterson, Mark Carney; Old: Clay Patterson, Matt Johnson
Defense: New: Dave Duggan, Kody Morgan; Old: Dave Duggan

OHIO
Defense: New: John Hauser; Old: Spence Nowinsky

WESTERN MICHIGAN
Offense: New: Walt Bell; Old: Billy Cosh
Defense: New: Scott Power; Old: Phil Esposito

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Kvon Sherman	LB	Toledo	★★★	24*
2.	Tre Richardson	WR	Toledo	★★★	32*
3.	Zy'marion Lang	WR	Toledo	★★★	725
4.	Carlos Mitchell	ATH	Western Michigan	★★★	746
5.	Tony Mathis	S	Ohio	★★★	891
6.	Jay'Quan Bostic	WR	Toledo	★★★	918
7.	Javon Hammonds	Edge	Miami (Ohio)	★★★	930
8.	Terence Marshall	WR	Western Michigan	★★★	933
9.	Najiib Anderson	S	Western Michigan	★★★	958
10.	Dominic Dorwart	WR	Ohio	★★★	1,047

**Junior college transfer/juco ranking*

AKRON ZIPS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 130 | MAC PREDICTION: 11 | 2023 RECORD: 2-10, 1-7 MAC

OFFENSE The quarterback competition will continue into the fall between Cal transfer Ben Finley and Tahj Bullock, who was the Zips' QB2 last season. Finley won the starting job out of camp last year for the Golden Bears but ended up starting only three games and seeing action in three others. The pocket passer completed 57 percent of his passes and had three touchdowns and four interceptions. Bullock is more mobile, having 66 passing attempts and 62 rushing attempts in 10 games last season for Akron.

The running game, which was 131st in the nation last season, will be led by running backs Charles Kellom and Jordon Simmons. Kellom saw very limited action last season at Akron, while Simmons arrives from Michigan State after four years, having been used sparingly in the backfield in the last two. The offensive line struggled last season, and questions remain, though three of the five projected starters saw action last year.

The top three pass-catchers are gone from last season. Alex Adams is a player to watch on the outside. Former Arizona State transfer Jake Newell (16 catches last season) will start at tight end.

DEFENSE Akron ranked No. 32 in yards allowed last season nationally but No. 81 in points allowed, thanks in part to a minus-9 turnover margin. The Zips should be fairly stout again and will hope that the scoring defense falls in line with the strength of the unit.

Three starters are back on the defensive line, led by All-MAC first-team defensive end CJ Nunnally IV. Nunnally had a team-best seven sacks. Linebackers Antavious Fish, Bryan McCoy and Shammond Cooper form a dependable three-man rotation for the two linebacker spots.

In the secondary, three key contributors return, led by corner Devonte Golden-Nelson. He tied for the team lead with two picks. Nickel Darrian Lewis was third on the team in tackles.

SPECIALISTS Dante Jackson returns at punter after averaging only 37.5 yards per kick, but 30 of his 65 punts were fair catches, and he had three kicks over 50 yards. Placekicking was an issue for Akron last year, with Jackson, Noah Perez and Owen Wiley sharing the duties and going a combined 9-for-16 with just one make beyond 40 yards. Wide receiver Bobby Golden will be set to return punts and kickoffs.

FINAL ANALYSIS Akron won two games a year ago and lost three others in overtime, but the arrow isn't necessarily pointing up in Joe Moorhead's third season. Akron is 7-47 the last five seasons, and the non-conference slate offers up three Power 4 opponents in Ohio State, Rutgers and South Carolina. The win total may not climb past two this season unless the quarterback play and offensive line exceed expectations.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Ohio State
Sept. 7	at Rutgers
Sept. 14	Colgate
Sept. 21	at South Carolina
Sept. 28	at Ohio
Oct. 5	Bowling Green
Oct. 12	at W. Michigan
Oct. 26	Eastern Michigan
Nov. 2	Buffalo
Nov. 13	at Northern Illinois
Nov. 19	at Kent State
Nov. 26	Toledo

2023 RESULTS (2-10, 1-7 MAC)

Sept. 2	at Temple	L	21-24
Sept. 9	Morgan State	W	24-21
Sept. 16	at Kentucky	L	3-35
Sept. 23	at Indiana (ot)	L	27-29
Sept. 30	Buffalo (ot)	L	10-13
Oct. 7	Northern Illinois	L	14-55
Oct. 14	at Central Michigan	L	10-17
Oct. 21	at Bowling Green	L	14-41
Nov. 1	Kent State	W	31-27
Nov. 8	at Miami (Ohio)	L	0-19
Nov. 14	at E. Michigan (ot)	L	27-30
Nov. 24	Ohio	L	14-25

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Sean Patrick, RB	★★★
2.	Tristen Graham, EDGE	★★★
3.	Brayden Roggow, QB	★★★
4.	Mike Smith, CB	★★★
5.	Khalil Witherspoon, WR	★★★
6.	Kyan Mason, ATH	★★★
7.	Keyveon Johnson, CB	★★★
8.	Elijah Davis, DL	★★★
9.	Ronald Hull, DL	★★★
10.	Rodrick Hunter, S	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Joe Moorhead • Record at School: 4-20 (2 years) • Career Record: 56-45 (8 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Billy Fessler • Defensive Coordinator: Tim Tibesar • Location: Akron, Ohio
Stadium: InfoCision Stadium (30,000)

CJ Nunnally IV

SCOUTING THE ZIPS

"This isn't a place where you can sustain success, but I think [head coach Joe] Moorhead is close to creating something, at least long enough to get to a better job. They were in so many games last year; if you just look at the record, you don't get an idea of how much better they were. They were in overtime games all last season and just couldn't close it out. If they can improve their offensive line, maybe there's one or two drives that go their way and they're a four- or five-win team last season and you can see it coming. You have to think they're going to break out this season and start showing what they've built."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	81	Adrian Norton (So.)	84	Paul Davis (So.)
WR	7	**ALEX ADAMS (SR.)**	4	Bobby Golden (Jr.)
WR	23	Myles Walker (Jr.)	82	Jean Louis III (So.)
LT	75	Dayne Shor (Jr.)	77	Jayvin James (So.)
LG	50	Laurence Seymore (So.)	57	Delvin Morris (So.)
C	54	**TYHLER WILLIAMS (SO.)**	72	Colin Lyons (Jr.)
RG	56	Keylen Davis (So.)	58	Jerrod Burrell (Jr.)
RT	78	Eli Fields (Sr.)	55	Josh Blanchard (Sr.)
TE	88	Jake Newell (So.)	87	Max Whisner (So.)
QB	15	Ben Finley (Jr.)	10	Tahj Bullock (Jr.)
RB	22	Charles Kellom (So.)	9	Jordon Simmons (Sr.)

DEFENSE (6)

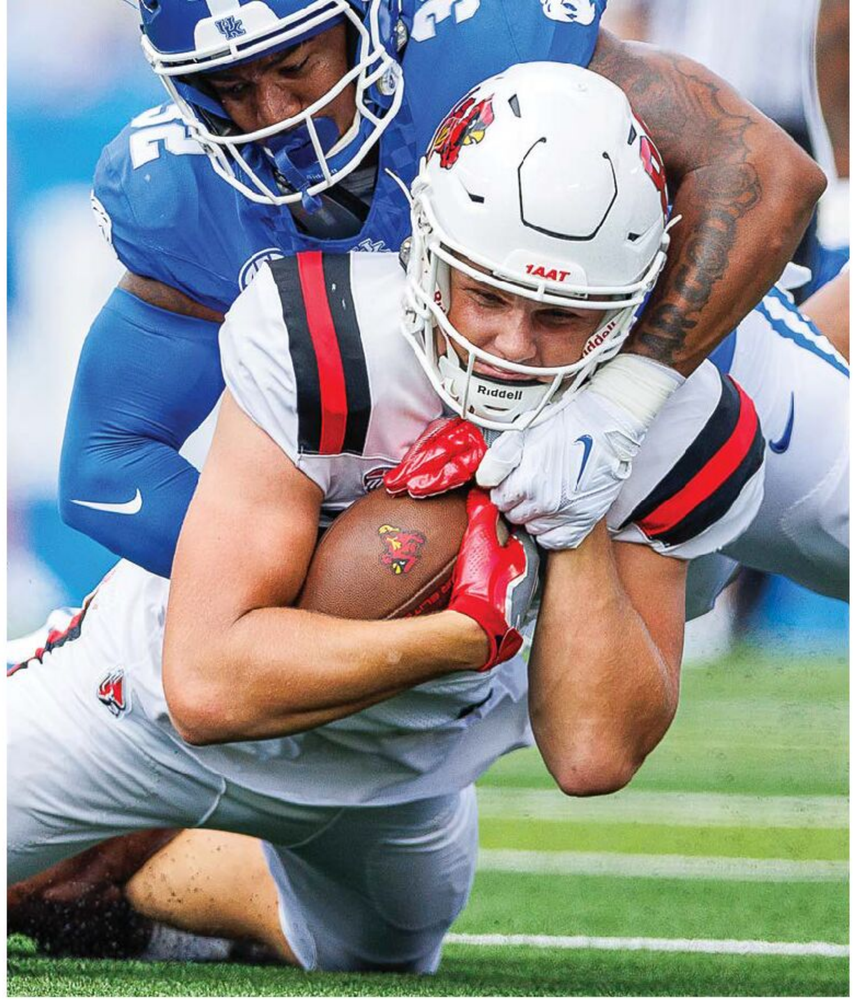
DE	93	**BENNETT ADLER (SR.)**	49	Bruno Dall (Fr.)
DT	5	**LAMA LAVEA (JR.)**	54	Kiawan Murphy (So.)
DT	99	Nathan Kapongo (Sr.)	52	Marcus Moore Jr. (Fr.)
DE	91	**CJ NUNNALLY IV (SR.)**	22	Kam Cheatom (So.)
LB	10	**ANTAVIOUS FISH (SR.)**	8	Rich Benenge (Fr.)
LB	40	**BRYAN MCCOY (JR.)**	3	Shammond Cooper (Sr.)
CB	11	Devonte Golden-Nelson (Jr.)	27	Catrell White (Fr.)
CB	6	Joey Hunter (Jr.)	4	Justin Anderson (Jr.)
NB	24	**DARRIAN LEWIS (JR.)**	15	Terence Thomas (So.)
SS	18	DiMarco Johnson (Jr.)	9	Paul Lewis III (Sr.)
FS	2	Daymon David (So.)	26	Aman Greenwood (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	44	Noah Perez (Jr.)	KR	4	Bobby Golden (Jr.)
P	36	Dante Jackson (Sr.)	PR	4	Bobby Golden (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Jeff Lange



Tanner Koziol

Jordan Prather-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE CARDINALS

"Most of us in the league thought last season would be [Mike Neu's] final one. They had the breakout year during Covid and couldn't capitalize on their success. ... They've got a new play-caller on offense [Jared Elliott], but they don't have their quarterback picture settled. Right now it looks a lot like last year. They lost their good DC [Tyler Stockton] to Boise, and now they're replacing almost all of those guys on that side. ... They don't have much momentum going into this season, and the championship run is starting to look more and more like an outlier. I wouldn't be stunned if this job is open at the end of the season or a bit earlier."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	5	Justin Bowick (Jr.)	85	Cam Pickett (So.)
WR	16	Qian Magwood (Jr.)	17	Trey Firestone (So.)
WR	2	Ty Robinson (Jr.)	8	Malcolm Gillie (Sr.)
LT	76	Arkel Anugwom (Fr.)	78	Yaser Al-Awadi (So.)
LG	64	**JON MUCCIOLO (SR.)**	57	Eli Freeman (Fr.)
C	54	**ETHAN CROWE (SR.)**	73	Cole Mosier (So.)
RG	77	**TYRAN TYO (SO.)**	71	Kevin Meeder (Jr.)
RT	70	Tristan Cook (Fr.)	66	Chris Hood (So.)
TE	88	**TANNER KOZIOL (JR.)**	87	Christian Abney (So.)
QB	3	Kadin Semonza (Fr.)	18	Aidan Leffler (So.)
RB	20	TJ Horton (Fr.)	38	Charlie Spegal (Jr.)
DEFENSE (1)				
DE	40	Riley Tolsma (Sr.)	43	Danny Royster (So.)
NT	57	Nathan Reichert (Sr.)	97	L'Cier Luter (Jr.)
DE	47	Drew Hughes (Jr.)	99	Dakari Frazier (So.)
RUSH	13	Brandon Berger (Sr.)	49	Justin Thomas (Jr.)
SNIPER	19	George Udo (Sr.)	34	DJ Fields (Fr.)
MLB	21	Joey Stemler (Jr.)	41	Ben Marsh (So.)
WLB	9	**KEIONTÉ NEWSON (SR.)**	22	Jack Beebe (Jr.)
FS	26	Jordan Coleman (So.)	25	Elijah Davis (Fr.)
BS	33	DD Snyder (Jr.)	16	AJ Taylor (Jr.)
LC	10	Jahmad Harmon (So.)	14	Marion Ponds (Sr.)
RC	12	Thailand Baldwin (Jr.)	28	Blair Schonhorst (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	96	Jackson Courville (So.)	KR	8 Malcolm Gillie (Sr.)
P	96	Jackson Courville (So.)	PR	0 Nick Munson (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

BALL STATE CARDINALS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 121 | MAC PREDICTION: 9 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 MAC

OFFENSE An offense that ranked No. 122 in scoring last season at 18.3 points per game needs a jolt, and the Cardinals hope it will come from a revived passing offense led by a redshirt freshman. Quarterback Kadin Semonza played in four games last season and had some ups and downs before the coaching staff decided to redshirt him. Kiael Kelly finished out the season and won three of his final five starts, but Kelly had more rushing attempts than passing attempts, and the Cardinals want to get back into a pass-oriented attack. Kelly transferred in the spring.

Ty Robinson was projected to be the top pass-catcher last season, but he was injured in the second game at Georgia and never returned. He's back in 2024. Leading returning receiver Qian Magwood (41 catches, 358 yards, one TD) will man the slot, and FCS Eastern Illinois transfer Justin Bowick will be the second outside receiver with Robinson. Tight end Tanner Koziol, a third-team freshman All-American in 2022, is another key target.

At running back, 1,000-yard rusher Marquez Cooper entered the transfer portal in February, leaving what looks like a three-man committee in the rushing attack. The offensive line has both starting guards back in Taran Tyo and Jon Mucciolo, Ethan Crowe is an awards candidate at center and Cole Mosier saw playing time all over the line last year.

DEFENSE A unit that held its final six opponents to just 16.7 points per game is being completely rebuilt by new defensive coordinator Jeff Knowles, especially along the defensive line, where all four starters are gone. The staff is high on rush end Brandon Berger, and Justin Thomas is another disruptive pass-rusher.

Linebacker Keionté Newson will quarterback the unit again after leading the team with 81 tackles. Sniper linebacker George Udo, a graduate transfer from Cincinnati, should be an impact newcomer, and Joey Stemler saw a lot of snaps in a reserve role in 2023.

Experienced corners Jahmad Harmon and Thailand Baldwin are both back, while the safety position will need to be rebuilt.

SPECIALISTS Punter Lucas Borrow, who earned third-team All-MAC honors, has transferred, leaving a hole to fill. Placekicker Jackson Courville is back. He was 15-for-17 inside 50 yards with a long of 48, but he missed all four attempts beyond 50.

FINAL ANALYSIS There are a lot of question marks on the defense, which was the strength of last year's team. Knowles will need to find answers at multiple positions if Ball State wants to earn head coach Mike Neu his third bowl invitation in five years. Offensively, a lot will be riding on the quarterback position and whether or not Semonza is ready for the job.

2024 SCHEDULE	
Sept. 7	Missouri State
Sept. 14	at Miami (Fla.)
Sept. 21	at C. Michigan
Sept. 28	at James Madison
Oct. 5	Western Michigan
Oct. 12	at Kent State
Oct. 19	at Vanderbilt
Oct. 26	Northern Illinois
Nov. 5	Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 12	at Buffalo
Nov. 23	Bowling Green
Nov. 29	at Ohio

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 MAC)			
Sept. 2	at Kentucky	L	14-44
Sept. 9	at Georgia	L	3-45
Sept. 16	Indiana State	W	45-7
Sept. 23	Georgia Southern	L	3-40
Sept. 30	at Western Michigan	L	24-42
Oct. 7	at Eastern Michigan	L	10-24
Oct. 14	Toledo	L	6-13
Oct. 21	Central Michigan	W	24-17
Nov. 1	at Bowling Green	L	21-24
Nov. 7	at Northern Illinois	W	20-17
Nov. 18	Kent State	W	34-3
Nov. 25	Miami (Ohio)	L	15-17

TOP 10 RECRUITS*	
1. Sam Feeney, LB	★★★
2. DJ Williams, RB	★★★
3. Xavier Dahn, DL	★★★
4. Dantu Gardner, EDGE	★★★
5. Grant Haworth, OL	★★★
6. Dion Smith, DL	★★★
7. Mason Riggins, TE	★★★
8. Brady Barrowman, OT	★★★
9. Kameron Anthony, TE	★★★
10. Jordan Suggs, S	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Neu • Record at School: 37-56 (8 years) • Career Record: 37-56 (8 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Jared Elliott • Defensive Coordinator: Jeff Knowles • Location: Muncie, Ind.
Stadium: Scheumann Stadium (22,500)

BOWLING GREEN FALCONS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 106 | MAC PREDICTION: 4 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 5-3 MAC

OFFENSE Former Missouri and Indiana quarterback Connor Bazelak will play his sixth year of college football — and second at Bowling Green — and will direct an offense that hopes to improve on last season's No. 108 ranking. Bazelak played through a leg injury last season and missed most of spring drills but should be 100 percent by the fall. He played 11 games last year and had 12 touchdowns and seven interceptions.

The Falcons also welcome back their leading rusher, Terion Stewart, who averaged 6.1 yards per carry and 85 yards per game before being lost for the season after nine games. Stewart should carry a heavy load this fall for an offense that hopes for a 50-50 split in running and passing.

The Falcons' top player in the receiving game is tight end Harold Fannin Jr., who led the team with 44 catches, 623 yards and six touchdowns. The top wideouts are gone, although depth was added in Auburn transfer Malcolm Johnson Jr. and Kansas State transfer RJ Garcia II.

The offensive line returns four starters, including third-team All-MAC tackle Alex Wollschlaeger.

DEFENSE The Falcons will field an experienced defense after finishing fourth in the MAC in yards allowed per game a year ago and tying for first in the nation in turnovers. All three defensive linemen return, plus a host of others who saw action in 2023. Dontrez Brown led the group in tackles and also had two fumble recoveries.

Linebacker Joseph Sipp Jr. was second on the team in tackles and will be his unit's leader. Senior Demetrius Hardamon was injured against Michigan and missed the rest of the season, but he will be back in the fall.

Two starters return in the secondary, including second-team All-MAC cornerback Jordan Oladokun, who had four interceptions. Also joining the backline is Northern Illinois transfer CJ Brown, who was first-team All-MAC in 2021 and second-team in 2022.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Alan Anaya returns after going 13-for-18 on field goals with a long of 42. Troy transfer Zach Long and punter Jackson Kleather will also battle for those duties in the fall. Kleather should handle punting again after averaging 39.2 yards last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS Bowling Green is hoping to compete for a spot in the MAC Championship Game with a veteran defense and quarterback. The Falcons lost five games last season to teams (including national champion Michigan) that combined for a 59-10 record. The schedule is more forgiving this year, but some wide receivers need to emerge for the offense to be good enough to get near the top of the MAC.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Fordham
Sept. 7	at Penn State
Sept. 21	at Texas A&M
Sept. 28	Old Dominion
Oct. 5	at Akron
Oct. 12	Northern Illinois
Oct. 19	Kent State
Oct. 26	at Toledo
Nov. 5	at C. Michigan
Nov. 12	Western Michigan
Nov. 23	at Ball State
Nov. 29	Miami (Ohio)

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 5-3 MAC)

Sept. 2	at Liberty	L	24-34
Sept. 9	Eastern Illinois	W	38-15
Sept. 16	at Michigan	L	6-31
Sept. 23	Ohio	L	7-38
Sept. 30	at Georgia Tech	W	38-27
Oct. 7	at Miami (Ohio)	L	0-27
Oct. 14	at Buffalo	W	24-14
Oct. 21	Akron	W	41-14
Nov. 1	Ball State	W	24-21
Nov. 8	at Kent State	W	49-19
Nov. 14	Toledo	L	31-32
Nov. 21	at W. Michigan	W	34-10
Dec. 26	vs. Minnesota #	L	24-30

#Quick Lane Bowl

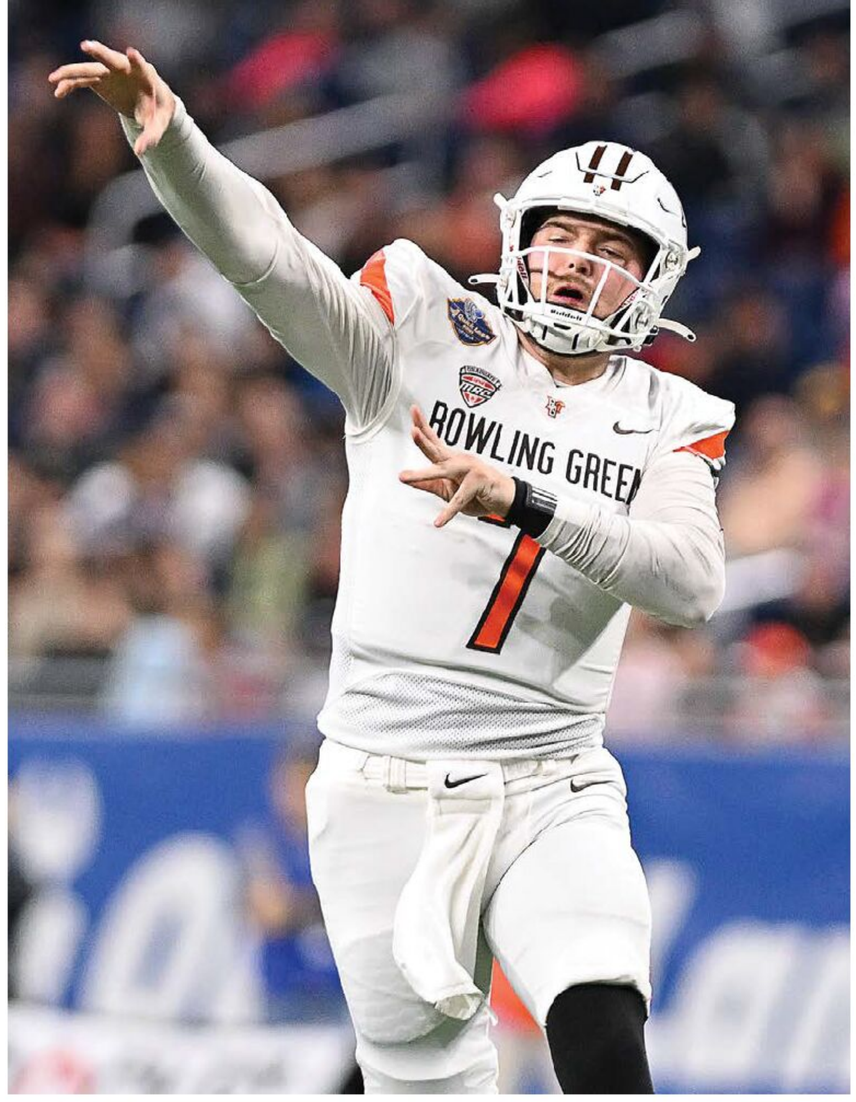
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Maurice Hayes, CB	★★★
2.	Caleb Goodloe, WR	★★★
3.	Martreece Dillard, DL	★★★
4.	Nakai Amachree, RB	★★★
5.	Dorian Pringle, LB	★★★
6.	Dillon Robinson, OT	★★★
7.	Malik Moses, DL	★★★
8.	Isaac Hill, EDGE	★★★
9.	TJ Nelson, S	★★★
10.	Cameron Pettaway, RB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Scot Loeffler • Record at School: 20-35 (5 years) • Career Record: 20-35 (5 years)
Offensive Coordinators: Greg Nosal, Max Warner • Defensive Coordinators Steve Morrison, Sammy Lawanson
Location: Bowling Green, Ohio • Stadium: Doyt L. Perry Stadium (24,000)



Connor Bazelak

SCOUTING THE FALCONS

"Give the administration credit for sticking with this staff. It was rough for a while, but they have an identity now. They're very opportunistic on defense, they create lots of negative yardage plays and force a lot of turnovers and they led most of the stats in our league. The second half of the year, you saw them really pick it up and kind of click. [Scot Loeffler's] offense is about mixing some pro-style and spread concepts, so you never know what you're going to get. They're a solid, not great roster, but it seems like they've stabilized a little bit."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	1	Malcolm Johnson Jr. (Sr.)	5	Jaylon Tillman (Sr.)
WR	2	RJ Garcia II (Jr.)	11	Finn Hogan (Jr.)
LT	52	Nick Reimer (Sr.)	75	Nate Pabst (Jr.)
LG	55	**TUNDE FATUKASI (SR.)**	65	Jake Burns (Sr.)
C	57	**ALEX PADGETT (JR.)**	65	Jake Burns (Sr.)
RG	75	**NATE PABST (JR.)**	72	Cade Zimmerly (Jr.)
RT	50	**ALEX WOLLSHLAEGER (SR.)**	55	Tunde Fatukasi (Sr.)
TE	10	Levi Gazarek (Sr.)	45	Rocco Hicks (Jr.)
TE	44	**HAROLD FANNIN JR. (JR.)**	34	Adrian Wilson (34)
QB	7	**CONNOR BAZELAK (SR.)**	12	Camden Orth (Sr.)
RB	4	Terion Stewart (Jr.)	28	Jaison Patterson (Sr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DT	60	**DONTREZ BROWN (SR.)**	38	Dierre Kelly (Sr.)
NG	54	**ANTHONY HAWKINS (SR.)**	55	Evan Branch-Haynes (Jr.)
DE	99	**ALI SAAD (SR.)**	33	Jordan Porter (Sr.)
OLB	11	**DEMETRIUS HARDAMON (SR.)**	48	Myles Bradley (So.)
ILB	3	**JOSEPH SIPP JR. (JR.)**	28	David Afogho (Fr.)
ILB	2	Brocke Horne (Sr.)	36	Jabari Mitchell (Fr.)
OLB	13	Charles Rosser (Sr.)	35	Justin Eklund (So.)
CB	4	Deshawn Jones Jr. (Sr.)	7	Jacorey Benjamin (Sr.)
CB	1	**JORDAN OLADOKUN (SR.)**	18	Jalen Burton (Sr.)
S	9	**DARIUS LORFILS (JR.)**	8	Trent Simms (Sr.)
S	6	CJ Brown (Jr.)	32	Patrick Day (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	98	Alan Anaya (Jr.)	KR	1	Malcolm Johnson Jr. (Sr.)
P	14	Jackson Kleather (So.)	PR	2	RJ Garcia II (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Lon Horwedel-USA TODAY Sports

Red Murdock

SCOUTING THE BULLS

"This is a big TBD here. They never really carried over what worked with Lance [Leipold] when Mo [Maurice Linguist] was there, but there's no room for error at a program like this. ... [Pete] Lembo was a winner at his previous stops as a head coach, and he knows how to compete in this league. [Offensive coordinator] Dave [Patenaude] has a good track record as a play-caller; I imagine they're going to be no-huddle, 11, play with some tempo. If they do what Miami did, it's not very complicated, very simple with easy adjustments, but really effective. The defense is going to be totally different; that's where Mo really had his fingerprints on the team."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	17	Nik McMillan (So.)	6	Chance Morrow (So.)
WR	11	Taji Johnson (Sr.)	1	Qua Sanders (Sr.)
WR	2	JJ Jenkins (Sr.)	82	Victor Snow (So.)
LT	74	**ISAIAH WRIGHT (SR.)**	73	Henry Tabansi (Fr.)
LG	78	**TYLER DOTY (SR.)**	65	Chayce Chadwick (Jr.)
C	66	Dom Polizzi (Sr.)	71	Matt Pajuste (Jr.)
RG	79	**TREVOR BROCK (JR.)**	58	Matthew Glen (Jr.)
RT	77	**CAELAN SHEPARD (SR.)**	67	Alex Heininger (So.)
TE	81	Jake Orlando (Sr.)	85	Andrew Schnackenberg (Sr.)
QB	10	CJ Ogbonna (Sr.)	9	Gunnar Gray (Jr.)
RB	22	Al-Jay Henderson (Jr.)	20	Jacqez Barksdale (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	53	**C.J. BAZILE (SR.)**	52	Jacari Bennett (Fr.)
DT	90	George Wolo (Sr.)	99	Cornell Evans (So.)
DT	98	Daishon Folsom (Sr.)	55	Tristan Souza (Jr.)
DE	0	Kobe Stewart (Jr.)	11	Nick Roy (Fr.)
LB	2	**RED MURDOCK (SO.)**	45	Gio De Leon (Sr.)
LB	18	Dion Crawford (So.)	37	Mathew Hilty (Jr.)
CB	1	Jayden Oliver (Sr.)	28	Marquis Cooper (Jr.)
CB	43	**CHARLES McCARTHERENS (SO.)**	3	Oliver Bridges (So.)
NB	8	Jalen McNair (Sr.)	7	Solomon Brown (Sr.)
S	10	**MARCUS FUQUA (SR.)**	19	Jonathan Capo (Jr.)
S	14	**SAVEON BROWN (SO.)**	39	Jamiere Munson (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	31	Cameron Carson (Sr.)	KR	33	Mark-Anthony Scott Jr. (So.)
P	94	Anthony Venneri (Jr.)	PR	17	Nik McMillan (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Paul Hokanson/UBBulls.com

BUFFALO BULLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 129 | MAC PREDICTION: 10 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 3-5 MAC

OFFENSE Buffalo will need to break in several new skill players behind a veteran offensive line. Quarterback CJ Ogbonna played in eight games as a reserve in 2023 and ran more than he threw. Ogbonna finished with 51 carries for 214 yards and three TDs, while he threw just 21 passes, completing eight for 87 yards and a touchdown. A pair of productive junior college transfers are also in the QB mix, with Gunnar Gray and Richie Watts putting up big numbers in previous stops.

At running back, Al-Jay Henderson is the likely starter and ran for 301 yards in 2022, but he fell off in 2023 and hopes to find his previous level. Jacqez Barksdale is the leading returning rusher with 248 yards and two touchdowns in his first season at Buffalo.

Buffalo lost its top five pass-catchers. Nik McMillan saw his season end after seven games, but he had 13 catches for 180 yards and is the team's leading returning receiver. Tight end Jake Orlando also had his season ended early, but he started the first four games and should be the top tight end.

Tyler Doty, a third-team All-MAC selection, is one of four returning starters on the offensive line. This will be his third season starting. Tackle Isaiah Wright will also be starting for the third straight year for the Bulls.

DEFENSE Defensive tackle George Wolo returns to anchor the defensive line and is an all-league candidate. Defensive end C.J. Bazile has 4.5 career sacks and started every game last season.

At linebacker, Red Murdock and Dion Crawford have the position in good hands. Murdock won the starting job halfway through last season and finished third on the team in tackles with 60 and forced four fumbles. Crawford started twice as a true freshman last season.

Sixth-year senior safety Marcus Fuqua is back to lead the defensive backfield. He had seven interceptions in 2022 and has 33 career starts. Corner Jayden Oliver had a really good spring, and sophomore Charles McCartherens won the job as a true freshman and finished with nine starts and three interceptions at the other corner.

SPECIALISTS Punter Anthony Venneri could contend for All-MAC honors after averaging 43 yards as a freshman and 43.8 as a sophomore. At kicker, UMass transfer Cameron Carson should take over. He was 32-for-49 on field goals in three years but 0-for-6 from beyond 50.

FINAL ANALYSIS Buffalo has a lot of moving pieces for new head coach Pete Lembo, who had a five-year run in the MAC at Ball State and went 33-29. There will likely be some personnel movement in the summer as the Bulls have some inexperience, especially on offense. Bowl eligibility would be a significant accomplishment for Lembo in Year 1.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Lafayette
Sept. 7	at Missouri
Sept. 14	Massachusetts
Sept. 21	at N. Illinois
Sept. 28	at Connecticut
Oct. 12	Toledo
Oct. 19	Western Michigan
Oct. 26	at Ohio
Nov. 2	at Akron
Nov. 12	Ball State
Nov. 20	at E. Michigan
Nov.26	Kent State

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 3-5 MAC)

Sept. 2	at Wisconsin	L	17-38
Sept. 9	Fordham	L	37-40
Sept. 16	Liberty	L	27-55
Sept. 23	at Louisiana	L	38-45
Sept. 30	at Akron (ot)	W	13-10
Oct. 7	Central Michigan	W	37-13
Oct. 14	Bowling Green	L	14-24
Oct. 21	at Kent State	W	24-6
Oct. 31	at Toledo	L	13-31
Nov. 7	Ohio	L	10-20
Nov. 15	at Miami (Ohio)	L	10-23
Nov. 21	Eastern Michigan	L	11-24

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Patrick Clacks, WR	★★★
2.	Terrance Shelton, RB	★★★
3.	Tyrell Simmons, WR	★★★
4.	Shamar Riser-Pressley, EDGE	★★★
5.	Ronnell Davis, S	★★★
6.	Xavier Leonard, S	★★★
7.	John Keough, S	★★★
8.	Jackson Bellamy, OL	★★★
9.	Bobby Mays, WR	★★★
10.	Mikey Crawford, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Pete Lembo • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 112-65 (15 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Dave Patenaude • Defensive Coordinator: Joe Bowen • Location: Buffalo, N.Y.
Stadium: UB Stadium - University at Buffalo (29,013)

CENTRAL MICHIGAN CHIPPEWAS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 113 | MAC PREDICTION: 7 | 2023 RECORD: 5-7, 3-5 MAC

OFFENSE Central Michigan's attack will go as far as its quarterback will take it, but who that quarterback will be still needs to be determined. Bert Emanuel Jr. is in his third year with the program, and thus far he's been much more of a runner than passer, with 117 career rushing attempts (for 716 yards) and just 45 pass attempts. Emanuel is a tremendous athlete and needs to be on the field, but it remains to be seen if he will be the every-play quarterback. Iowa transfer Joe Labas is in contention for the job, and true freshman Jadyn Glasser was impressive in the spring.

Whoever gets the job can lean on two quality running backs in Marion Lukes and Myles Bailey. Lukes is an all-purpose back who can get outside and catch passes, while Bailey is a between-the-tackles runner.

The three leading receivers are back in Tyson Davis (444 yards), Jesse Prewitt III (438 yards) and Chris Parker (409 yards). Redshirt freshman Evan Boyd stood out in the spring.

There are three starters back on the offensive line. Right tackle Brayden Swartout was second-team All-MAC last season, and center Dominic Serapiglia III should contend for All-MAC honors this season.

DEFENSE Up front, Michael Heldman, Jason Williams and Jonah Pace are the starters, and Oumar Conde made some head-turning plays in the spring, but there is a question as to whether the coaches can get to the preferred seven-to-eight man rotation and keep players fresh. Williams should compete for All-MAC honors at nose tackle.

There is depth at linebacker, where Justin Whiteside and Dakota Cochran return after combining for 5.5 sacks. Notre Dame transfer Nolan Ziegler should make an immediate impact in fall camp.

In the secondary, second-team All-MAC performer Donte Kent is back. The former corner is the leading man on the backline. Fellow safeties Caleb Spann and Elijah Rickard will also start, and corner Da'Raun McKinney won a job late last season. CMU was last against the pass in the MAC last season, so improvement is a must.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Tristan Mattson connected on just 7-of-14 field goals, though he did set a school record with a 58-yarder. Punter David Chapeau is a transfer from East Carolina. Lukes, who took two kickoffs back for touchdowns and was the MAC's Returner of the Year, will take on the same role, and wide receiver Javorian Wimberly will again handle punts.

FINAL ANALYSIS The key to getting back to a bowl for head coach Jim McElwain will be developing a consistent passing game and shoring up the pass defense. All four non-conference opponents failed to make a bowl last year, so the opportunity is there for CMU to return to the postseason.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	C. Connecticut St.
Sept. 7	at FIU
Sept. 14	at Illinois
Sept. 21	Ball State
Sept. 28	San Diego State
Oct. 12	Ohio
Oct. 19	at E. Michigan
Oct. 26	at Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 5	Bowling Green
Nov. 12	at Toledo
Nov. 19	Western Michigan
Nov. 30	at N. Illinois

2023 RESULTS (5-7, 3-5 MAC)

Sept. 1	at Michigan State	L	7-31
Sept. 9	New Hampshire	W	45-42
Sept. 16	at Notre Dame	L	17-41
Sept. 23	at South Alabama	W	34-30
Sept. 30	Eastern Michigan	W	26-23
Oct. 7	at Buffalo	L	13-37
Oct. 14	Akron	W	17-10
Oct. 21	at Ball State	L	17-24
Oct. 31	Northern Illinois	W	37-31
Nov. 7	at W.Michigan	L	28-38
Nov. 15	at Ohio	L	17-34
Nov. 24	Toledo	L	17-32

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Travis Ambrose, TE	★★★
2.	Bryce Rowe, CB	★★★
3.	Brock Townsend, RB	★★★
4.	Jadyn Glasser, QB	★★★
5.	Adam Kaminski, EDGE	★★★
6.	Isaiah Atchison, WR	★★★
7.	Victor Earl, ATH	★★★
8.	Nasir Williams, WR	★★★
9.	Tysen Campbell, S	★★★
10.	Logan Borodychuk, QB	★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jim McElwain • Record at School: 29-28 (5 years) • Career Record: 73-56 (10+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: TBD • Defensive Coordinator: Robb Akey • Location: Mount Pleasant, Mich.
Stadium: Kelly/Shorts Stadium (45,000)

Marion Lukes

SCOUTING THE CHIPPEWAS

"The expectations for a SEC head coach coming in never really matched up with the job, but Mac [Jim McElwain] has done a nice job here overall. They've been hit a little bit with the portal by being punished for developing good players. They're a good mix on offense of spread and pro style and can get creative. They ran the QB more because he was more of a runner than a thrower last year. They've got good personnel on defense. They don't score a ton of points but enough to allow the defense to keep them in games. ... The biggest question here is how long Mac wants to keep doing it at this level. There was a lot of talk about him stepping aside."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	17	**JESSE PREWITT III (SR.)**	85	Evan Boyd (Fr.)
WR	13	**CHRIS PARKER (JR.)**	10	Stephan Bracey Jr. (Sr.)
WR	19	Tyson Davis (Jr.)	25	Javorian Wimberly (Fr.)
LT	75	**DAVIS HEINZEN (JR.)**	78	Vashon Bailey (Sr.)
LG	59	Brady Ploucha (So.)	55	Ryan Blum (Fr.)
C	63	**DOMINIC SERAPIGLIA III (SR.)**	55	Ryan Blum (Fr.)
RG	74	John Burke (Fr.)	55	Ryan Blum (Fr.)
RT	68	**BRAYDEN SWARTOUT (SR.)**	76	Martin Koivisto (So.)
TE	88	DeCorion Temple (So.)	87	Jacob Kaminski (Jr.)
QB	3	Bert Emanuel Jr. (So.)	2	Joe Labas (Jr.)
RB	9	**MARION LUKES (SR.)**	26	Myles Bailey (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	97	Michael Heldman (Jr.)	49	Keshawn Hayden (Fr.)
NT	94	Jason Williams (Sr.)	98	Jonathan Decker (Jr.)
DT	91	Jonah Pace (Jr.)	99	Pius Odjugo (Jr.)
LB	12	Jordan Kwiatkowski (Jr.)	14	Fernando Sanchez III (Jr.)
MLB	11	Dakota Cochran (Jr.)	24	Nolan Ziegler (Jr.)
LB	6	**JUSTIN WHITESIDE (SR.)**	40	Lawai'a Brown (Jr.)
CB	32	**DA'RAUN MCKINNEY (SR.)**	7	Ed Conoran (So.)
CB	31	Marcus Badgett (So.)	9	Mark-Allen Gay (Fr.)
NB	4	**DONTE KENT (SR.)**	13	Bryce Rowe (Fr.)
SS	15	**CALEB SPANN (JR.)**	18	Jaion Jackson (Fr.)
FS	21	Elijah Rickard (Jr.)	16	Nahree Biggins (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	42	Tristan Mattson (Sr.)	KR	9	Marion Lukes (Sr.)
P	36	David Chapeau (Sr.)	PR	25	Javorian Wimberly (Fr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Matthew Yeoman-USA TODAY Sports

Peyton Price

Alex Gould/The Republic

SCOUTING THE EAGLES

"A lot of teams have a lot of slogans, but this one is legit. Their whole 'E Tough' mantra, that's real. They are the physically toughest team in the league. They don't have the best personnel, ever, but the culture is mental and physical toughness and play with an edge. And yeah, they play through the whistle. But they will themselves to a lot of victories. If there's a metric out there for games where the less talented team wins because they outwork you, EMU would lead the entire nation. They want to make you play physically and get you distracted. It works."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	17	**JB MITCHELL III (SR.)**	13	Jamarian Wheeler (Sr.)
WR	11	Terry Lockett Jr. (Sr.)	22	Porter Rooks (Sr.)
WR	92	Oran Singleton (Jr.)	9	Makhail Wood (So.)
LT	76	Chris Mayo (Sr.)	72	Mack Indestad (So.)
LG	63	**MICKEY REWOLINKSI (SR.)**	75	Carson Lee (Sr.)
C	75	**CARSON LEE (SR.)**	67	Broderick Roman (Sr.)
RG	66	Daniel Warnsman (Sr.)	50	Owen Snively (Sr.)
RT	73	Joshua Anderson (Jr.)	54	Blake Bustard (Sr.)
TE	83	**JERE GETZINGER (SR.)**	88	Blake Daniels (Sr.)
QB	16	Cole Snyder (Sr.)	15	Jeremiah Salem (Jr.)
RB	34	Delbert Mimms III (Sr.)	12	Dontae McMillan (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	45	**JOEY ZELINSKY (SR.)**	97	Jefferson Adam (Jr.)
NG	94	**PEYTON PRICE (SR.)**	99	Melvin Swindle II (Sr.)
DT	33	Carter Evans (Jr.)	91	Malik Tullis (So.)
LEO	47	**JUSTIN JEFFERSON (SR.)**	97	Jefferson Adam (Jr.)
MLB	36	Zach Mowchan (Sr.)	44	Zion Fonua (Jr.)
WLB	21	JT Killen (Sr.)	46	Luke Murphy (Jr.)
STAR	1	**JOSHUA SCOTT (SR.)**	4	Daiquan White (So.)
CB	4	**DAIQUAN WHITE (SO.)**	35	Jaheim Jenkins (Jr.)
CB	29	Dramarian McNulty (Jr.)	15	Jordan Toney (Fr.)
BAN	34	Bryce Llewellyn (Jr.)	39	Barry Manning (Jr.)
FS	3	Quentavius Scandrett (Sr.)	27	David Carter Jr. (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	35	Jesús Gómez (Sr.)	KR	12	Dontae McMillan (Sr.)
P	30	Mitchell Tomasek (Sr.)	PR	92	Oran Singleton (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

EASTERN MICHIGAN EAGLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 109 | MAC PREDICTION: 6 | 2023 RECORD: 6-7, 4-4 MAC

OFFENSE Quarterback play was a major issue for Eastern Michigan last season, and head coach Chris Creighton is hoping he has the solution in Buffalo graduate transfer Cole Snyder. In two seasons as the Bulls starter, Snyder threw 31 touchdowns and 17 interceptions, averaging 206 passing yards per game and completing 57 percent of his throws.

The Eagles lost their top three running backs, but incoming transfer Delbert Mimms III (NC State) impressed in the spring. Mimms ran for eight touchdowns for the Wolfpack last season. At wide receiver, JB Mitchell III is the leading returning receiver and will be Snyder's primary target. Other wideouts to watch: NC State transfer Porter Rooks and sophomore Makhail Wood, who the coaches feel has a high ceiling. Tight end Jere Getzinger emerged late last season and could be more of an option.

The offensive line has two starters back in center Carson Lee and guard Mickey Rewolinksi. Improvement will be needed from a unit that gave up 32 sacks and failed to open many holes in the run game.

DEFENSE Eastern Michigan lost three projected defensive starters by the end of its first game in 2023. All three of those injured players are back, plus a high-profile transfer in the middle of the defense. Linebacker JT Killen comes in from Coastal Carolina, where he made 65 tackles after earning a starting spot as a senior, and he arrives with 55 games of experience. Linebacker Zach Mowchan was lost in the opener last season and will form a strong duo with Killen.

On the defensive line, nose guard Peyton Price has NFL potential, and Justin Jefferson was disruptive with 11 QB hurries and 7.5 tackles for a loss. Carter Evans returns from injury and is projected to regain a starting spot.

In the secondary, Joshua Scott returns after missing 2023 and will be a candidate for All-MAC honors, as will Daiquan White, who had a stellar true freshman season in which he led the team with 12 PBUs.

SPECIALISTS Punter Mitchell Tomasek (44.1 yards per punt) was first-team All-MAC, and kicker Jesús Gómez hit two field goals from beyond 50 yards and was 12-for-16 overall. Eastern Michigan was second in the MAC in both punt and kickoff returns last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS Eastern Michigan was disappointed with its 6-7 finish and bowl game loss to South Alabama. The quarterback play figures to be improved, which in turn will help the running game as the offensive line gets rebuilt. Defensively, the Eagles should be solid at all three levels if they can stay healthy. A return to a bowl game looks to be in the works.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Massachusetts
Sept. 7	at Washington
Sept. 14	Jacksonville St.
Sept. 21	St. Francis (Pa.)
Sept. 28	at Kent State
Oct. 12	Miami (Ohio)
Oct. 19	Central Michigan
Oct. 26	at Akron
Nov. 2	Toledo
Nov. 13	at Ohio
Nov. 20	Buffalo
Nov. 30	at W. Michigan

2023 RESULTS (6-7, 4-4 MAC)

Sept. 1	Howard	W	33-23
Sept. 9	at Minnesota	L	6-25
Sept. 16	Massachusetts	W	19-17
Sept. 23	at Jacksonville St.	L	0-21
Sept. 30	at Central Michigan	L	23-26
Oct. 7	Ball State	W	24-10
Oct. 14	Kent State	W	28-14
Oct. 21	at Northern Illinois	L	13-20
Oct. 28	Western Michigan	L	21-45
Nov. 8	at Toledo	L	23-49
Nov. 14	Akron (ot)	W	30-27
Nov. 21	at Buffalo	W	24-11
Dec. 23	vs. South Alabama#	L	10-59

#68 Ventures Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dalin Wilkins, WR	★★★
2.	Dodji Dahoue, OL	★★★
3.	Oran Singleton, WR	★★★
4.	Jace Stuckey, QB	★★★
5.	Andrew Steger, OT	★★★
6.	Terrelle Elmore, EDGE	★★★
7.	Everett Small, OT	★★★
8.	Jordan Toney, CB	★★★
9.	Antonio Floyd, WR	★★★
10.	Javon Thomas, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Chris Creighton • Record at School: 52-68 (10 years) • Career Record: 191-114 (27 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Mike Piatkowski • Defensive Coordinator: Ben Needham • Location: Ypsilanti, Mich.
Stadium: Rynearson Stadium (30,200)

KENT STATE GOLDEN FLASHES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 132 | MAC PREDICTION: 12 | 2023 RECORD: 1-11, 0-8 MAC

OFFENSE Quarterback Tommy Ulatowski saw playing time in 10 games last season, including three late-season starts. He threw for more than 200 yards in his first two starts and finished the season with seven touchdowns and two interceptions while completing 50 percent of his passes. He is an RPO-style quarterback who exited the spring as QB1.

Running back Gavin Garcia, who led the Golden Flashes with 544 yards and two touchdowns, will share time with Kansas transfer Ky Thomas. Thomas played for Kent State head coach Kenni Burns at Minnesota in 2021 and rushed for 824 yards.

Two All-MAC receivers are back in Chrishon McCray and Luke Floriea. McCray was first-team all-conference after averaging 68 receiving yards per game and will be a clear No. 1 receiver. Floriea works the slot and had 39 catches last year.

Up front, the tight ends will be new, but a young offensive line returns virtually intact. The unit surrendered 41 sacks a year ago when it featured freshmen at both guard spots and at center, but Burns is optimistic that the group will be much improved after a full season together.

DEFENSE The defensive line looks like it will be a strength, although third-team All-MAC defensive tackle CJ West entered the portal in the spring. Oliver Billotte and Stephen Daley have a chance to replace West on the MAC honor roll by season's end. The line rotation is solid and will look to develop some depth in the fall.

At linebacker, CJ Harris transferred after spring ball, but coaches were thrilled with Rocco Nichol's performance and do not expect a drop-off. The Flashes will also get Khalib Johns back after two years of injuries. He is expected to be a major contributor.

The Flashes ranked No. 50 against the pass last year, which was Kent State's best ranking in the major defensive categories, but both starting corners are gone and reinforcements will need to emerge. Safeties Alex Branch and Josh Baka will provide a veteran presence.

SPECIALISTS Andrew Glass is on pace to become Kent State's all-time leading scorer and was second-team All-MAC last year after going 15-for-17 on field goals. He did not attempt a kick beyond 49 yards in 2023. Punter Josh Smith also returns after averaging 41 yards per kick.

FINAL ANALYSIS Kent State extended Burns one year despite his 1-11 debut, showing a vote of confidence in his rebuilding effort. With 10 of the 11 losses by double digits, there is nowhere to go but up for a team that will travel to Pittsburgh, Penn State and Tennessee in the non-conference. How far up will be dependent on the offensive line's development and whether the front seven on defense can make significant improvement.

Chrishon McCray

SCOUTING THE GOLDEN FLASHES

"There are a ton of questions here. Almost every school in the league has to deal with the negative side of the portal, but the Sean Lewis era disappeared the moment he left. They had a move on offense at OC and a new DC, too, so it's like another first year again. Kenni [Burns] is a good coach, but when he took over they lost almost everyone on offense from a skill player perspective. They didn't inherit any talent; it was like starting an expansion team. Their best DT just went to the portal, too. For them, it's how are you going to simultaneously work to fill portal attrition and develop high school guys? It feels impossible."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)				
WR	0	**LUKE FLORIEA (SR.)**	26	J.B. Awolowo (Sr.)
WR	2	**CHRISHON McCRAY (SO.)**	19	Ali Fisher (Jr.)
WR	35	Jack Coulson (Sr.)	84	Jahzae Kimbrough (So.)
LT	77	**CAM GOLDEN (SR.)**	73	**JIMTO OBIDEGWU (JR.)**
LG	57	**DUSTYN MORELL (JR.)**	65	Tristen Bittner (Jr.)
C	75	**DREW PAGE (SO.)**	55	Nick Bujnowski (Jr.)
RG	70	**CHRIS FARRELL (SO.)**	69	Braylon Smith (So.)
RT	72	Cecil Wilson (So.)	76	Garret Masterson (Jr.)
TE	83	Peyton Faulkner (So.)	18	Hunter Hopperton (Jr.)
QB	14	Tommy Ulatowski (Jr.)	11	JD Sherrod (Fr.)
RB	30	Ky Thomas (Sr.)	21	Gavin Garcia (Jr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	6	**STEPHEN DALEY (JR.)**	95	Antoine Campbell Jr. (Jr.)
DT	52	John Jackson (Jr.)	53	Kaden Beatty (So.)
DT	14	**OLIVER BILLOTTE (JR.)**	90	Mason Maddox (So.)
DE	7	Matt Harmon (Sr.)	17	Mattheus Carrol (Sr.)
SLB	44	Rocco Nicholl (Jr.)	32	Jayden Studio (Fr.)
MLB	8	**KHALIB JOHNS (SR.)**	45	Mason Woods (Jr.)
WLB	24	Nicholask Giacolone (Sr.)	51	Sayed Abuhamdeh (So.)
CB	21	Xavier Cokley (Sr.)	23	Naim Muhammad (Sr.)
CB	15	Dallas Branch (Sr.)	19	Jaylen Dotson (Jr.)
SS	20	Josh Baka (Jr.)	27	Malcolm Folk (Jr.)
FS	28	**ALEX BRANCH (SR.)**	13	Tevin Tucker (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	60	Andrew Glass (Sr.)	KR 2	Chrishon McCray (So.)
P	96	Josh Smith (Sr.)	PR 0	Luke Floriea (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Jeff Lange

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Pittsburgh
Sept. 7	St. Francis (Pa.)
Sept. 14	at Tennessee
Sept. 21	at Penn State
Sept. 28	Eastern Michigan
Oct. 12	Ball State
Oct. 19	at Bowling Green
Oct. 26	at W. Michigan
Nov. 6	Ohio
Nov. 13	at Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 19	Akron
Nov. 26	at Buffalo

2023 RESULTS (1-11, 0-8 MAC)

Aug. 31	at UCF	L	6-56
Sept. 9	at Arkansas	L	6-28
Sept. 16	C. Connecticut St.	W	38-10
Sept. 23	at Fresno State	L	10-53
Sept. 30	Miami (Ohio)	L	3-23
Oct. 7	at Ohio	L	17-42
Oct. 14	at E. Michigan	L	14-28
Oct. 21	Buffalo	L	6-24
Nov. 1	at Akron	L	27-31
Nov. 8	Bowling Green	L	19-49
Nov. 18	at Ball State	L	3-34
Nov. 25	Northern Illinois	L	27-37

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Javier Etheridge, ATH	★★★
2.	Darrion Gilliam, WR	★★★
3.	Jayden Studio, LB	★★★
4.	Nylan Brown, LB	★★★
5.	Jaire Rawlison, CB	★★★
6.	Josue Cordoba, DL	★★★
7.	Clinton Robinson, S	★★★
8.	Elijah Williams, OL	★★★
9.	Jaihien Roy, EDGE	★★★
10.	Dakota Taylor, TE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kenni Burns • Record at School: 1-11 (1 year) • Career Record: 1-11 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Mark Carney • Defensive Coordinator: David Duggan • Location: Kent, Ohio • Stadium: Dix Stadium (25,319)

Brett Gabbert

SCOUTING THE REDHAWKS

"Of everyone in our league, they play the best complementary football. They win games without trying to be flashy, and they're comfortable in tight games. That's a sign of a great culture. They've turned it around since [Chuck] Martin's third season; they've recruited both lines really well. I think [Brett] Gabbert is underrated as a thrower and a runner, honestly. He should get more attention. Defensively, they are not super complicated, but they beat you into submission with their physicality."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)					
WR	11	Javon Tracy (So.)	1	Andre Johnson (Sr.)
WR	15	Cade McDonald (Sr.)	1	Andre Johnson (Sr.)
WR	14	Reggie Virgil (Jr.)	83	Ryan Sims (Fr.)
LT	70	**WILL JADOS (JR.)**	51	Eric Smith (So.)
LG	71	**JOHN YOUNG (SR.)**	74	Greg Smith (Fr.)
C	64	**KOLBY BORDERS (SR.)**	77	Charlie Nank (Jr.)
RG	73	Brandon Lawhorn Moore (So.)	76	Gavin Rohrs (So.)
RT	56	**REID HOLSKEY (SR.)**	78	Drew Terrill (So.)
TE	89	**JACK COLDIRON (SR.)**	88	Nate Muersch (Sr.)
QB	5	**BRETT GABBERT (SR.)**	18	Maddux Kopp (Jr.)
RB	9	**KENNY TRACY (SR.)**	2	Dylan Downing (Sr.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	11	Corey Suttle (Sr.)	9	Devon Hammonds (Fr.)
DT	52	Nasir Washington (Jr.)	55	Malachi Clark (So.)
DT	96	**KOBE HILTON (SR.)**	92	Roosevelt Andrews III (Fr.)
DE	8	**BRIAN UGWU (SR.)**	20	Adam Trick (So.)
LB	15	**MATT SALOPEK (SR.)**	44	Cameron Williams (Sr.)
LB	10	**TY WISE (SR.)**	12	Corban Hondru (Jr.)
CB	13	**RAION STRADER (SO.)**	3	William Hardrick (Jr.)
CB	24	Mychal Yharbrough (Fr.)	5	Jayden Williams (Sr.)
NB	23	Oscar McWood (Jr.)	17	TJ Rush (Jr.)
S	29	Silas Waters (Jr.)	17	TJ Rush (Jr.)
S	16	**ELI BLAKEY (JR.)**	19	Ambe' Caldwell (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	98	Kellan McLaughlin (Fr.)	KR 9	Kenny Tracy (Sr.)
P	35	Alec Bevelhimer (Sr.)	PR 15	Cade McDonald (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Sam Navarro-USA TODAY Sports

MIAMI (OHIO) REDHAWKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 74 | MAC PREDICTION: 1 | 2023 RECORD: 11-3, 7-1 MAC

OFFENSE Brett Gabbert returns for his sixth year after a gruesome leg injury in October against Toledo ended his season after eight games. Gabbert still managed to earn third-team All-MAC honors and is the league's top returning QB. He is expected to have no restrictions this fall.

In front of him, four of the five starting offensive linemen return from the MAC champs. Left tackle Will Jados and right tackle Reid Holskey were both second-team All-MAC last season, and center Kolby Borders is a strong candidate to join them on the MAC honor rolls this season.

Top rusher Rashad Amos and leading receiver Gage Larvadain both entered the portal. Running back Kenny Tracy saw significant action last year and was a strong pass protector and threat out of the backfield, but he will see a significant uptick from his 46 carries. Purdue transfer Dylan Downing will also be in the rotation. At receiver, Javon Tracy (Kenny's brother) and Cade McDonald are experienced, and veteran tight end Jack Coldiron will return after missing most of 2023 with a knee injury.

DEFENSE The RedHawks ranked seventh nationally last season with 15.9 points allowed per game, and three players who earned all-league honors are among the returners. That list starts with MAC Defensive Player of the Year Matt Salopek, who enters 2024 with 392 career tackles from his linebacker spot. His instincts are off the charts, and he will again be the centerpiece of the unit. Next to him, athletic Ty Wise was a second-team All-MAC linebacker who may have a chance to play at the next level.

Defensive end Brian Ugwu was also second-team All-MAC after piling up eight sacks and 10 QB hurries. After Ugwu, however, the defensive line will have to be rebuilt a little bit. Kobe Hilton is experienced on the interior, but there will be some learning on the go for the rest of the line.

In the secondary, two starters are back. Cornerback Raion Strader was an FWAA Freshman All-American, and safety Eli Blakey also returns. The two other spots and the nickel will be relatively new.

SPECIALISTS Lou Groza Award-winning placekicker Graham Nicholson transferred to Alabama, leaving a hole to fill. Punter Alec Bevelhimer returns after averaging 45 yards per punt. Miami was 15th in the nation in punt returns with McDonald the primary returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS The league champs have their starting QB and offensive line back, plus the MAC Defensive Player of the Year. Expectations for Chuck Martin's team are to return to the championship game for the third time in six years given the experience on hand. If the RedHawks can shore up the defensive line and find some productive skill players on offense, Miami will be a force in the MAC.

2023 RESULTS (11-3, 7-1 MAC)

Sept. 1	at Miami	L	3-38
Sept. 9	at Massachusetts	W	41-28
Sept. 16	at Cincinnati (ot)	W	31-24
Sept. 23	Delaware State	W	62-20
Sept. 30	at Kent State	W	23-3
Oct. 7	Bowling Green	W	27-0
Oct. 14	at W. Michigan	W	34-21
Oct. 21	Toledo	L	17-21
Oct. 28	at Ohio	W	30-16
Nov. 8	Akron	W	19-0
Nov. 15	Buffalo	W	23-10
Nov. 25	at Ball State	W	17-15
Dec. 2	vs. Toledo #	W	23-14
Dec. 16	vs. App State %	L	9-13

#Detroit %Cure Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Northwestern
Sept. 14	Cincinnati
Sept. 21	at Notre Dame
Sept. 28	Massachusetts
Oct. 5	at Toledo
Oct. 12	at E. Michigan
Oct. 19	Ohio
Oct. 26	Central Michigan
Nov. 5	at Ball State
Nov. 13	Kent State
Nov. 19	Northern Illinois
Nov. 29	at Bowling Green

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Javon Hammonds, EDGE	★★★
2.	D'Shawntae Jones, RB	★★★
3.	Tito Glass, RB	★★★
4.	Carter Herriman, LB	★★★
5.	Jayden Fuller, LB	★★★
6.	Jacob Schorsch, OT	★★★
7.	Brach Rice, LB	★★★
8.	Zach Meeks, TE	★★★
9.	Thomas Gotkowski, QB	★★★
10.	Josh Ringer, ATH	★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Chuck Martin • Record at School: 56-62 (10 years) Career Record: 130-69 (16 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Pat Welsh • Defensive Coordinator: Bill Brechin • Location: Miami, Ohio Stadium: Yager Stadium (24,286)

NORTHERN ILLINOIS HUSKIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 105 | MAC PREDICTION: 3 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 5-3 MAC

OFFENSE First-team All-MAC running back Antario Brown is back for his senior season after amassing 1,296 yards and 10 touchdowns on the ground last year for the Huskies. Brown has 2,523 career rushing yards and got roughly two-thirds of the carries last season. He will be leaned on to pace an offense that had a 56/44 run/pass ratio last season and was second in the MAC in rushing. Complementing Brown will be Gavin Williams, who had 488 rushing yards and 24 catches out of the backfield.

In front of Brown and Williams is an offensive line that lost two starters but has significant experience. The two "newcomers" are Logan Zschernitz, who has 33 career starts to his credit, and Evan Buss, who saw action in five games in 2023 and has 12 career starts.

Quarterback will be a question mark into the fall as NIU looks for Rocky Lombardi's replacement. Ethan Hampton was the primary back-up last season, but he is in a three-man battle with the athletic Jalen Macon and walk-on Josh Holst. Whoever wins the job will have a strong WR1 in senior Trayvon Rudolph, a third-team All-MAC selection. Tight end Grayson Barnes is also back after catching a team-high five touchdowns. From there, some younger players will need to step up.

DEFENSE Two of the four starting defensive linemen are back, but NIU used 8-10 players in its rotation last year and has plenty of experience. Devonte O'Malley is a two-year starter at defensive tackle, and Roy Williams is a potential breakout player at defensive end.

NIU plays a two-linebacker alignment, and Jaden Dolphin is back to man one of the spots after finishing second on the team in tackles. At the other spot, FCS Southeast Missouri State grad transfer Christian Fuhrman was running with the first unit in the spring.

In the defensive backfield, Javaughn Byrd is a standout at corner who will compete for first-team All-MAC honors. Jashon Prophete has earned the honored No. 1 jersey with his play and will be another key piece of a unit that led the MAC in passing defense a year ago.

SPECIALISTS Both the punter and kicker will be back. Punter Tom Foley had a 40.6 average with eight punts of at least 50 yards. Junior Kanon Woodill went 11-of-17 last season on field goals, though he missed his final three attempts of the season. He was 2-of-5 from beyond 40 yards.

FINAL ANALYSIS Last season's 5-3 record in the MAC has the program back on the right trajectory. The Huskies need a quarterback to emerge to prevent defenses from loading up against the run. If the defense is near the top of the league again, a return to a bowl will be in the cards.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Western Illinois
Sept. 7	at Notre Dame
Sept. 21	Buffalo
Sept. 28	at NC State
Oct. 5	Massachusetts
Oct. 12	at Bowling Green
Oct. 19	Toledo
Oct. 26	at Ball State
Nov. 6	at W. Michigan
Nov. 13	Akron
Nov. 19	at Miami (Ohio)
Nov. 30	Central Michigan

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 5-3 MAC)

Sept. 2	at Boston College (ot)	W	27-24
Sept. 9	Southern Illinois	L	11-14
Sept. 16	at Nebraska	L	11-35
Sept. 23	Tulsa	L	14-22
Sept. 30	at Toledo	L	33-35
Oct. 7	at Akron	W	55-14
Oct. 14	Ohio	W	23-13
Oct. 21	Eastern Michigan	W	20-13
Oct. 31	at Central Michigan	L	31-37
Nov. 7	Ball State	L	17-20
Nov. 14	Western Michigan	W	24-0
Nov. 25	at Kent State	W	37-27
Dec. 23	vs. Arkansas St. #	W	21-19

#Camellia Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ben Gustafson, OT	★★★
2.	Ivan Moore, EDGE	★★★
3.	Ahmir Smith, RB	★★★
4.	AJ Guida, LB	★★★
5.	Grey Rumohr, OT	★★★
6.	Jason Fowler, EDGE	★★★
7.	Lance Ingold, EDGE	★★★
8.	Telly Johnson, LB	★★★
9.	Elijah Porter, RB	★★★
10.	Luke Marble, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Thomas Hammock • Record at School: 24-33 (5 years) • Career Record: 24-33 (5 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Wesley Beschorner • Defensive Coordinator: Nick Benedetto • Location: DeKalb, Ill.
Stadium: Huskie Stadium (24,000)

Antario Brown

SCOUTING THE HUSKIES

"You know what you're getting here on offense. Of all the teams in the MAC, they're gonna bring out the heavy personnel, 21 and 12, more than anyone else. They like to use motions and gap schemes, and they want to hit you hard and then play-action it. They're very physical running it. Defensively, they had one of the more talented fronts in our league last year. After the off year in '22, they rebounded nicely. They're great at developing high school talent, too, even in the portal era."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	12	Kenji Lewis (Jr.)	10	Kyle Thomas (Fr.)
WR	3	**TRAYVON RUDOLPH (SR.)**	23	Dane Pardridge (So.)
WR	27	Keyshaun Pipkin (So.)	87	Cam Thompson (So.)
LT	54	**EVAN MALCORE (SO.)**	71	Drew Hoth (Jr.)
LG	79	**J.J. LIPPE (SR.)**	75	Thomas Paasch (Fr.)
C	65	Logan Zschernitz (Sr.)	64	Matt Schooley (Sr.)
RG	76	**JOHN CHAMPE (SR.)**	53	Luke Skartvedt (Fr.)
RT	60	Evan Buss (Sr.)	55	Abiathar Curry (So.)
TE	81	Grayson Barnes (Sr.)	80	Jake Appleget (So.)
QB	2	Ethan Hampton (Jr.)	14	Jalen Macon (Jr.)
RB	1	**ANTARIO BROWN (SR.)**	21	Gavin Williams (Sr.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE	4	**RAISHEIN THOMAS (SR.)**	11	Jalonnie Williams (Jr.)
DT	8	**DEVONTE O'MALLEY (SR.)**	0	Skyler Gill-Howard (Jr.)
DT	51	Cade Haberman (Sr.)	10	Demond Taylor Jr. (Sr.)
DE	97	Roy Williams (Jr.)	99	Pierce Oppong (Jr.)
LB	26	**JADEN DOLPHIN (SR.)**	25	Jake Gassaway (So.)
LB	44	Christian Fuhrman (Sr.)	32	Quinn Urwiler (Sr.)
DB	1	**JASHON PROPHETE (SR.)**	13	Ty Myles (Jr.)
CB	2	**JAVAUGHN BYRD (SR.)**	12	Cam'Ron Dabney (Sr.)
CB	5	Amariyun Knighten (So.)	3	**JACOB FINLEY (SO.)**
SS	7	**JORDAN HANSEN (SR.)**	6	Muhammed Jammeh (Jr.)
FS	9	**NATE VALCARCEL (SR.)**	22	Cyrus McGarrell (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	92	Kanon Woodill (Jr.)	KR	3	Trayvon Rudolph (Sr.)
P	98	Tom Foley (Sr.)	PR	23	Dane Pardridge (So.)

Returning starters in ***BOLD***

Phil Masturzo/ Beacon Journal]

Tank Pearson

SCOUTING THE BOBCATS

"This league is being decimated by the portal, but I think they've been hit by the portal worse than anyone. Of all the questions you would have looking at the roster, it's how they fill the spots that were caused by attrition and how they can prevent the numbers from being that high in the future. Offensively, in a lot of ways, they're similar to Miami but a little more spread-oriented. They're a case study for other teams to see how much you can install from your playbook when you're constantly turning guys over. It could be a really hard season for them."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	7	Chase Hendricks (So.)	2	Jailen Hammer (Jr.)
WR	88	Caleb Gossett (Jr.)	3	Max Rodarte (Jr.)
WR	6	Coleman Owen (Sr.)	11	Rodney Harris II (So.)
LT	77	Jacob Dennison (Sr.)	74	Tigana Cisse (Fr.)
LG	61	Kaden Rogers (Jr.)	60	Trent Allen (Jr.)
C	69	**PARKER TITSWORTH (SR.)**	52	Dane Jackson (Sr.)
RG	66	**CHRISTOPHE ATKINSON (SR.)**	51	Davion Weatherspoon (Jr.)
RT	73	Joseph Habinowski (Sr.)	67	Kam Wright (So.)
TE	14	Bryce Butler (Jr.)	85	Mason Williams (Fr.)
QB	13	Parker Navarro (Sr.)	15	Jacob Winters (Fr.)
RB	28	Rickey Hunt Jr. (Fr.)	21	Nolan McCormick (Jr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DT	81	Bralen Henderson (Jr.)	55	Jordon Jones (So.)
DT	16	Chris Mayfield (Sr.)	92	RJ Keuchler (Fr.)
DE	18	Ben McNaboe (Sr.)	95	CJ Doggette (So.)
EDGE	19	Kadin Schmitz (So.)	13	Kaci Seegars (Jr.)
ILB	35	Shay Taylor (Jr.)	31	Andrew Marshall (Fr.)
WLB	9	Blake Leake (Sr.)	25	Michael Molnar (So.)
CB	12	Tank Pearson (Sr.)	5	Jacob Proche (Sr.)
CB	4	Roman Parodie (Sr.)	26	Mekah Ryder (Jr.)
NB	22	**ADONIS WILLIAMS JR. (JR.)**	3	Jeremiah Wood (Sr.)
S	8	**AUSTIN BRAWLEY (JR.)**	2	Miles Fleming (Sr.)
S	6	Dustin Johnson (Sr.)	28	Jalen Thomeson (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	48	Jacob Lewis (Sr.)	KR	28 Rickey Hunt Jr. (Fr.)
P	43	Jack Wilson (Sr.)	PR	12 Tank Pearson (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Matt Lunsford-USA TODAY Sports

OHIO BOBCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 114 | MAC PREDICTION: 8 | 2023 RECORD: 10-3, 6-2 MAC

OFFENSE The Kurtis Rourke era is over at Ohio. The three-year starting quarterback and former MAC Offensive Player of the Year transferred to Indiana following the 2023 season, taking 34 career starts, more than 7,500 passing yards and 50 touchdown passes to Bloomington. And leading rusher Sieh Bangura (811 yards, seven TDs) transferred to Minnesota.

The Bobcats also have to replace their seven leading pass-catchers. And don't forget an offensive line that's refurbishing the left side.

UCF transfer Parker Navarro, a dual-threat QB, is the style head coach Tim Albin prefers. But will be throwing to an inexperienced group. Chase Hendricks (11 catches, 108 yards) is the leading returning wide receiver. No one else has more than three career catches as a Bobcat, though Coleman Owen is an impact transfer from FCS Northern Arizona. Returning players had a grand total of three touchdown receptions last season.

At running back, the Bobcats have redshirt freshman Rickey Hunt Jr., who scored five touchdowns in the Myrtle Beach Bowl.

DEFENSE Defensive coordinator Spence Nowinsky fled for Memphis during spring practice after guiding the nation's fourth-ranked defense last season. And the transfer portal decimated the Bobcats' defense.

Ohio already had to replace its top three tacklers, and then All-MAC defensive tackle Rayyan Buell (12.5 TFLs, 4.5 sacks) and end Bradley Weaver (13 TFLs, six sacks) entered the portal the week after spring practice. Bralen Henderson, FCS North Dakota transfer Ben McNaboe and Cincinnati transfer CJ Doggette must shoulder the load.

The linebacker corps is green, but Shay Taylor had a breakout showing in the Myrtle Beach Bowl, with six tackles, a sack and a fumble recovery.

Defensive backs Tank Pearson, Austin Brawley and Adonis Wiliams Jr. help comprise a secondary that keyed a top-15 pass defense ranking in the nation in 2023.

SPECIALISTS Twelve of Jack Wilson's 29 punts ended up inside the 20, and eight were 50-plus yards. Alex Kasee is back to handle kickoff duties. The Bobcats ranked in the top 35 in covering kicks, only allowing 17.7 yards per return. Kicker Jacob Lewis transferred in from Minnesota.

FINAL ANALYSIS Ohio had six All-MAC selections last season. None of them remain on the roster. The schedule-makers didn't cut the Bobcats any breaks, either. Ohio has difficult non-conference games (Kentucky, Syracuse and South Alabama) and MAC road games at Miami, Toledo and Central Michigan. It'll be his best coaching job if Albin leads the Bobcats to their third consecutive 10-win season.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Syracuse
Sept. 7	South Alabama
Sept. 14	Morgan State
Sept. 21	at Kentucky
Sept. 28	Akron
Oct. 12	at C.Michigan
Oct. 19	at Miami (Ohio)
Oct. 26	Buffalo
Nov. 6	at Kent State
Nov. 13	Eastern Michigan
Nov. 20	at Toledo
Nov. 29	Ball State

2023 RESULTS (10-3, 6-2 MAC)

Aug. 26	at San Diego State	L	13-20
Sept. 2	LIU	W	27-10
Sept. 9	at Florida Atlantic	W	17-10
Sept. 16	Iowa State	W	10-7
Sept. 23	at Bowling Green	W	38-7
Oct. 7	Kent State	W	42-17
Oct. 14	at Northern Illinois	L	13-23
Oct. 21	Western Michigan	W	20-17
Oct. 28	Miami (Ohio)	L	16-30
Nov. 7	at Buffalo	W	20-10
Nov. 15	Central Michigan	W	34-20
Nov. 24	at Akron	W	25-14
Dec. 16	vs. Georgia Southern#	W	41-21

#Myrtle Beach Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Tony Mathis, S	★★★
2.	Kesean Anderson, DL	★★★
3.	Dominic Dorwart, WR	★★★
4.	Seth Anstead, OL	★★★
5.	Parker Startz, LB	★★★
6.	Kaden Hurst, WR	★★★
7.	Duncan Brune, RB	★★★
8.	Bryce Parson, OL	★★★
9.	JT Haskins, ATH	★★★
10.	Hunter Thompson, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tim Albin • Record at School: 23-16 (3 years) • Career Record: 48-24 (6 years)
Offensive Coordinators: Scott Isphording, Allen Rudolph • Defensive Coordinator: John Hauser
Location: Athens, Ohio • Stadium: Peden Stadium (24,000)

TOLEDO ROCKETS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 85 | MAC PREDICTION: 2 | 2023 RECORD: 11-3, 8-0 MAC

OFFENSE The transfer portal hit the MAC runner-ups hard at the skill positions, as league MVP DeQuan Finn will take his quarterback skills to Baylor and Offensive Player of the Year Peny Boone is headed to Louisville after leading the MAC with 1,400 rushing yards and 15 touchdowns.

There is some experience for the Rockets and head coach Jason Candle to lean, however. Quarterback Tucker Gleason will take over after throwing 177 passes the last two years as a backup, and Jacquez Stuart will be the primary back after rushing for 47.8 yards per game. Five of the top six pass-catchers return, led by first-team All-MAC WR Jerjuan Newton and Junior Vandeross III. At tight end, Lenny Kühl was a projected starter last season but missed the year with an injury. He is back, along with Anthony Torres, who was second-team All-MAC in Kühl's absence.

All five offensive line starters are gone. The line will be rebuilt around left tackle Garrett Schwiebert and Ohio State transfer guard Jakob James.

DEFENSE The defensive line is deep and experienced, led by third-team All-MAC tackle Darius Alexander. Edge Jeremiah Peters is a disrupter, and D'Andre Ragin has a high ceiling. The unit will have seven to eight men in its rotation, with seven boasting quality playing time already.

At linebacker, Daniel Bolden returns after finishing second on the team in tackles with 94. He missed two full seasons with injuries prior to 2023. Jackson Barrow projects to be the other starter, and West Virginia transfer Lance Dixon is expected to be in the rotation and has a high ceiling.

The defensive backfield, which helped Toledo rank No. 16 nationally against the pass, needs to replace NFL first-round pick Quinyon Mitchell and third-team All-MAC performer Chris McDonald at corner. Safeties Maxen Hook (first-team All-MAC) and Emmanuel McNeil-Warren will be the strength of the backline and should compete for all-league honors.

SPECIALISTS The Rockets welcome back both kicker Luke Pawlak and punter Emilo Duran. Pawlak was third-team All-MAC after going 12-for-15 on field goals. Stuart, who averaged 29.1 yards on kick returns and had a touchdown, will resume those duties, and Newton could be the primary punt returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS Losing your quarterback, top rusher and entire offensive line makes it difficult to project another MAC Championship Game appearance for the Rockets, but Candle has proven that he can sustain success since taking over at Toledo in 2016. There is talent at the skill positions on offense, and the defense should be very solid again. How the offensive line develops will be the key if Toledo plans to compete for a conference championship.

Jacquez Stuart

SCOUTING THE ROCKETS

"This is the best program in the league. They're able to operate at a different level when it comes to creating talent. I think Jason [Candle] is the best coach in the league right now. They do a great job recruiting and developing to where they only have to plug a few holes with the portal and not recover like the rest of us. They like to build off the run, but they have a fantastic pass game and love to take shots downfield. They've developed guys who weren't heavily recruited for years. They're an ID-and-develop program. That's so crucial right now."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)				
WR	1	**JERJUAN NEWTON (SR.)**	84	Thomas Zsiros (Jr.)
WR	15	**JUNIOR VANDEROSS III (JR.)**		Tre Richardson (So.)
WR	9	**LARRY STEPHENS (JR.)**	85	Jaden Dottin (Jr.)
LT	67	Garrett Schwiebert (Jr.)	70	Rod Orr (Jr.)
LG	66	Carter Fouty (Jr.)	58	Drew Beckenhaupt (Jr.)
C	72	Ethan Spoth (So.)		Maddox Marcotte (So.)
RG		Jakob James (Sr.)	63	Grant Zimmerly (Fr.)
RT	65	Stephen Gales (So.)	74	Cole Rhett (Fr.)
TE	88	**ANTHONY TORRES (SR.)**	40	Lenny Kühl (So.)
QB	4	Tucker Gleason (Jr.)	6	John Alan Richter (So.)
RB	21	Jacquez Stuart (Sr.)	32	Willie Shaw III (Jr.)
DEFENSE (4)				
DT	9	**DARIUS ALEXANDER (SR.)**	59	Martez Poynter (Jr.)
DT	97	Cavon Butler (Sr.)	90	Esean Carter (Jr.)
OLB	44	**D'ANDRE RAGIN (SR.)**	35	Deshawn Holt (Sr.)
LB	42	Jackson Barrow (Sr.)		Lance Dixon (Sr.)
LB	31	**DANIEL BOLDEN (SR.)**	49	Chris D'Appolonia (So.)
OLB	46	Jeremiah Peters (Jr.)	99	Travion Ford (So.)
CB	12	Avery Smith (Jr.)	15	Micah Cherry (Sr.)
CB	21	Nasir Bowers (Jr.)		Jadarrius Perkins (Sr.)
S	22	Emmanuel McNeil-Warren (Jr.)	39	Dylan Hohler (Fr.)
S	25	**MAXEN HOOK (SR.)**	26	Braden Awls (So.)
S	20	Andre Fuller (Sr.)	23	Roland McGhee Jr. (Fr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	29	Luke Pawlak (Sr.)	KR	21 Jacquez Stuart (Sr.)
P	36	Emilo Duran (So.)	PR	1 Jerjuan Newton (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

2023 RESULTS (11-3, 8-0 MAC)

Sept. 2	at Illinois	L	28-30
Sept. 9	Texas Southern	W	71-3
Sept. 16	San José State	W	21-17
Sept. 23	Western Michigan	W	49-31
Sept. 30	Northern Illinois	W	35-33
Oct. 7	at Massachusetts	W	41-24
Oct. 14	at Ball State	W	13-6
Oct. 21	at Miami (Ohio)	W	21-17
Oct. 31	Buffalo	W	31-13
Nov. 8	Eastern Michigan	W	49-23
Nov. 14	at Bowling Green	W	32-31
Nov. 24	at Central Michigan	W	32-17
Dec. 2	vs. Miami (Ohio) #	L	14-23
Dec. 30	vs. Wyoming %	L	15-16

#Detroit %Arizona Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Duquesne
Sept. 7	Massachusetts
Sept. 14	at Mississippi St.
Sept. 21	at WKU
Oct. 5	Miami (Ohio)
Oct. 12	at Buffalo
Oct. 19	at N. Illinois
Oct. 26	Bowling Green
Nov. 2	at E. Michigan
Nov. 12	Central Michigan
Nov. 20	Ohio
Nov. 26	at Akron

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kvon Sherman, LB	★★★
2.	Tre Richardson, WR	★★★
3.	Zy'marion Lang, WR	★★★
4.	Hyajah Miller, CB	★★★
5.	Carlos Hazelwood, DL	★★★
6.	Michael-Arinze Ezirim, CB	★★★
7.	Korey Smith, LB	★★★
8.	Jay'Quan Bostic, WR	★★★
9.	Tashi Braceful, WR	★★★
10.	Kalieb Osborne, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jason Candle • Record at School: 65-35 (8+ years) Career Record: 65-35 (8+ years) • Offensive Coordinators: Mike Hallett, Robert Weiner • Defensive Coordinators: Vince Kehres, Ross Watson • Location: Toledo, Ohio • Stadium: Glass Bowl (26,038)

Lon Horwedel-USA TODAY Sports

Anthony Sambucci

Matt Bush-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE BRONCOS

"They're struggling against the portal while trying to build a new identity. Good luck with that — it feels impossible right now. They're changing over both coordinators, which isn't a good sign after the first year for a new head coach. The DC situation wasn't good; they held on to Lou [Esposito] to keep the recruiting class, and then they clashed during the season. ... [OC] Walt Bell, you know what you're getting with his system, and he knows what it's like to deal with a thin roster with some of the places he's been recently. ... The RB [Jalen Buckley] is their sole standout player; he's really good."

— An opposing MAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	17	**MALIQUE DIEUDONNE (JR.)**	24	Kaveion Mack (Jr.)
WR	9	**KENNETH WOMACK (SR.)**	1	Devaughn "Bugs" Mortimer (Jr.)
WR	5	**ANTHONY SAMBUCCI (SR.)**	2	Jordin Parker (Jr.)
LT	71	Adam Vandervest (Sr)	63	Jack Sherwin (Sr.)
LG	63	Jack Sherwin (Sr.)	51	John Hofer (Jr.)
C	77	**JACOB GIDEON (SR.)**	75	Addison West (Sr.)
RG	75	**ADDISON WEST (SR.)**	51	John Hofer (Jr.)
RT	73	**TED KUSHI (SR.)**	76	Chad Schuster (So.)
TE	86	**BLAKE BOSMA (JR.)**	83	Kadinn Morris (Jr.)
QB	11	Hayden Wolff (Sr.)	16	Mark Konecny (Jr.)
RB	6	**JALEN BUCKLEY (SO.)**	10	Zahir Abdus-Salaam (Sr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	93	**COREY WALKER (JR.)**	2	Popeye Williams (Jr.)
DT	54	**MASON NELSON (JR.)**	58	Tyson Lee (Jr.)
DT	10	**ISAIAH GREEN (JR.)**	11	Anterio Thompson (Jr.)
DE	99	Rodney McGraw (Jr.)	58	Tyson Lee (Jr.)
LB	15	Donald Willis (Sr.)	6	Jelani Willis (Jr.)
LB	8	**JACOB WAHLBERG (SR.)**	22	Boone Bonnema (Jr.)
LB	4	**DAMARI ROBERSON (SR.)**	6	Jelani Willis (Jr.)
CB	1	Bilhal Kone (Jr.)	23	Angelo Stockstill (Jr.)
CB	7	Isaiah Paul (Jr.)	23	Angelo Stockstill (Jr.)
S	5	**AARON WOFFORD (JR.)**	9	Ryan Raybuck (Sr.)
S	3	**TATE HALLOCK (SR.)**	9	Ryan Raybuck (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	37	Palmer Domschke (Jr.)	KR	2 Jordin Parker (Jr.)
P	35	Cameron Peasley (Jr.)	PR	2 Jordin Parker (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

WESTERN MICHIGAN BRONCOS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 108 | MAC PREDICTION: 5 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 3-5 MAC

OFFENSE Quarterback Hayden Wolff will be the starter as a fifth-year senior. Wolff played three years at Old Dominion before coming to Western Michigan last year. He started the final five games, one of which was a 333-yard effort in a win over Central Michigan.

There's plenty of talent at the skill positions. MAC Freshman of the Year Jalen Buckley will carry the load for the rushing attack after his 1,003-yard debut. Zahir Abdus-Salaam, who excels in pass protection, will be the third-down back. Virginia Tech transfer Keshawn King was limited to four games in his first season at Western Michigan due to injuries, but he has the potential to get significant carries.

At wide receiver, three of the top four pass-catchers are back, including Kenneth Womack, whose 76 receptions led the MAC. Anthony Sambucci had a team-high five touchdowns, and transfers Devaughn "Bugs" Mortimer (ULM) and Jordin Parker (New Mexico State) add serious speed.

The offensive line returns three starters, including two players who were All-MAC a year ago in center Jacob Gideon (first team) and guard Addison West (third team).

DEFENSE The Broncos return seven starters on a unit that ranked 10th in the MAC a year ago. The defensive line lost its top player in Marshawn Kneeland, but everyone else in the rotation will return. Corey Walker had a breakout season at defensive end, and Mason Nelson and Isaiah Green will be counted on heavily. Transfers Popeye Williams (Louisville) and Anterio Thompson (Iowa) are also expected to be immediate contributors.

At linebacker, former Purdue transfer Jacob Walhberg will be an all-league candidate after making 65 tackles a year ago. Former Minnesota transfer Donald Willis, Boone Bonnema and Damari Roberson will play key roles as seniors in new defensive coordinator Scott Power's system.

In the secondary, leading tackler Tate Hallock, a former Michigan State transfer, is back, as is fellow safety Aaron Wofford, who was second on the team in tackles. One corner will be Bilhal Kone, while the other will be determined in preseason camp.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Palmer Domschke returns after making 9-of-15 field-goal attempts in 2023. Domschke struggled beyond 40 yards, making just 3-of-8. The punting job belongs to Australian Cameron Peasley, a former Utah transfer who averaged 38.9 yards in limited duty last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS There is a lot of returning experience for the Broncos, and unlike last season, the quarterback position appears to be settled. A .500 record in MAC play and a return to a bowl game after a two-year absence are reasonable goals for second-year head coach Lance Taylor.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Wisconsin
Sept. 7	at Ohio State
Sept. 14	Bethune-Cookman
Sept. 28	at Marshall
Oct. 5	at Ball State
Oct. 12	Akron
Oct. 19	at Buffalo
Oct. 26	Kent State
Nov. 6	Northern Illinois
Nov. 12	at Bowling Green
Nov. 19	at C. Michigan
Nov. 30	Eastern Michigan

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 3-5 MAC)

Aug. 31	St. Francis (Pa.)	W	35-17
Sept. 9	at Syracuse	L	7-48
Sept. 16	at Iowa	L	10-41
Sept. 23	at Toledo	L	31-49
Sept. 30	Ball State	W	42-24
Oct. 7	at Mississippi St.	L	28-41
Oct. 14	Miami (Ohio)	L	21-34
Oct. 21	at Ohio	L	17-20
Oct. 28	at E. Michigan	W	45-21
Nov. 7	Central Michigan	W	38-28
Nov. 14	at Northern Illinois	L	0-24
Nov. 21	Bowling Green	L	10-34

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Najiib Anderson, S	★★★
2.	Conor Kenzinger, OT	★★★
3.	Gavin Dabo, OL	★★★
4.	Terence Marshall, WR	★★★
5.	Jordan Buckley, DL	★★★
6.	Carlos Mitchell, ATH	★★★
7.	LaVaris Stanford, CB	★★★
8.	Noah Bishop, EDGE	★★★
9.	Cameron Powell, CB	★★★
10.	Jayquan Reid, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Lance Taylor • Record at School: 4-8 (1 year) • Career Record: 4-8 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Walt Bell • Defensive Coordinator: Scott Power • Location: Kalamazoo, Mich. • Stadium: Waldo Stadium (30,200)

PREVIEW

Ashton Jeanty, Boise State

Ricky White III, UNLV

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1	**BOISE STATE**	BRONCOS
2	**UNLV**	REBELS
3	**FRESNO STATE**	BULLDOGS
4	**AIR FORCE**	FALCONS
5	**COLORADO STATE**	RAMS
6	**WYOMING**	COWBOYS
7	**UTAH STATE**	AGGIES
8	**SAN DIEGO STATE**	AZTECS
9	**HAWAI'I**	RAINBOW WARRIORS
10	**SAN JOSÉ STATE**	SPARTANS
11	**NEW MEXICO**	LOBOS
12	**NEVADA**	WOLF PACK

MWC CHAMPIONSHIP

BOISE STATE OVER UNLV

ALL MWC-TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	**Mikey Keene**	Fresno State
RB	**Ashton Jeanty**	Boise State
RB	**Harrison Waylee**	Wyoming
AP	**Malik Sherrod**	Fresno State
WR	**Tory Horton**	Colorado State
WR	**Ricky White III**	UNLV
WR	**Jalen Royals**	Utah State
TE	**John Michael Gyllenborg**	Wyoming
C	**Jacob Gardner**	Colorado State
OL	**Tiger Shanks**	UNLV
OL	**Kage Casey**	Boise State
OL	**Mose Vavao**	Fresno State
OL	**Nofoafia Tulafono**	Wyoming

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	**Ahmed Hassanein**	Boise State
DL	**Jordan Bertagnole**	Wyoming
DL	**Devo Bridges**	Fresno State
DL	**Soane Toia**	San José State
LB	**Shae Suiaunoa**	Wyoming
LB	**Jackson Woodard**	UNLV
LB	**Andrew Simpson**	Boise State
LB	**Chase Wilson**	Colorado State
CB	**Cameron Oliver**	UNLV
CB	**A'Marion McCoy**	Boise State
S	**Jack Howell**	Colorado State
S	**Ike Larsen**	Utah State

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	**Jonah Dalmas**	Boise State
P	**James Ferguson-Reynolds**	Boise State
KR	**Jacob De Jesus**	UNLV
PR	**Jacob De Jesus**	UNLV

AS For a look at second- and third-team selections, visit *AthlonSports.com*

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Arizona: Colorado State vs. Central Michigan

Famous Idaho Potato: Air Force vs. Western Michigan

Frisco: Wyoming vs. Rice

Hawaii: Fresno State vs. Jacksonville State

LA Bowl: Boise State vs. California

New Mexico: UNLV vs. Texas State

Jeanty: Robert Hanashiro-USA TODAY Sports; White: Joe Camporeale-USA TODAY Sports

COACHING CAROUSEL

BOISE STATE
Head Coach: New: Spencer Danielson; Old: Andy Avalos
Offense: New: Dirk Koetter, Nate Potter; Old: Bush Hamdan
Defense: New: Erik Chinander, Tyler Stockton; Old: Spencer Danielson, Kane Ioane

HAWAI'I
Offense: New: Timmy Chang; Old: Ian Shoemaker
Defense: New: Dennis Thurman; Old: Jacob Yoro

NEVADA
Head Coach: New: Jeff Choates; Old: Ken Wilson
Offense: New: Matt Lubick; Old: Derek Sage
Defense: New: Kane Ioane: Old: Kwame Agyeman, Mike Bethea

NEW MEXICO
Head Coach: New: Bronco Mendenhall; Old: Danny Gonzales
Offense: New: Jason Beck; Old: Bryant Vincent
Defense: New: Nick Howell; Old: Troy Reffett

SAN DIEGO STATE
Head Coach: New: Sean Lewis; Old: Brady Hoke
Offense: New: Sean Lewis; Old: Ryan Lindley
Defense: New: Eric Schmidt; Old: Kurt Mattix

SAN JOSÉ STATE
Head Coach: New: Ken Niumatalolo; Old: Brett Brennan
Offense: New: Craig Stutzmann; Old: Kevin McGiven

UTAH STATE
Defense: New: Nate Dreiling; Old: Joe Cauthen

WYOMING
Head Coach: New: Jay Sawvel: Old Craig Bohl
Offense: New: Jay Johnson; Old: Tim Polasek
Defense: New: Aaron Bohl; Old: Jay Sawvel

MWC RETURNING LEADERS

PASSING	ATT	COMP	PCT	YDS	TD	INT	AVG/G
Brayden Fowler-Nicolosi, Col. St.	470	292	62.1	3,460	22	16	288.3
Brayden Schager, Hawai'i	525	332	63.2	3,542	26	14	272.5
Mikey Keene, Fresno State	422	283	67.1	2,976	24	10	248.0

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Ashton Jeanty, Boise State	220	1,347	6.1	14	68	112.3
Harrison Waylee, Wyoming	164	947	5.8	5	75	94.7
Malik Sherrod, Fresno State	172	966	5.6	9	72	80.5

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Ricky White III, UNLV	88	1,483	16.9	8	82	105.9
Tory Horton, Colorado State	96	1,136	11.8	8	76	94.7
Jalen Royals, Utah State	71	1,080	15.2	15	71	83.1

DEFENSE

TACKLES
Jackson Woodard, UNLV (117); Jack Howell, Colorado State (114)

SACKS
Ahmed Hassanein, Boise State (12.5); Andrew Simpson, Boise State (9.5)

INTERCEPTIONS
Cameron Oliver, UNLV (5); Ike Larsen, Utah State (4)

GAMES TO WATCH

SEPT. 7 Boise State at Oregon
SEPT. 14 Colorado at Colorado State
SEPT. 28 Air Force at Wyoming
SEPT. 28 Fresno State at UNLV
OCT. 5 Navy at Air Force
OCT. 19 Colorado State at Air Force
OCT. 26 Boise State at UNLV
NOV. 2 Air Force at Army
NOV. 9 Fresno State at Air Force
NOV. 16 Wyoming at Colorado State
NOV. 23 Boise State at Wyoming
NOV. 30 Nevada at UNLV

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Boise State (64)
2. San Diego State (74)
3. Colorado State (80)
4. Fresno State (85)
5. San José State (89)
6. Wyoming (95)
7. UNLV (100)
8. Utah State (104)
9. Nevada (114)
10. Hawai'i (118)
11. Air Force (132)
12. New Mexico (167)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Tevita Manukainiu	OT	San José State	★★★★	224
2.	Chris Marshall	WR	Boise State	★★★★	3*
3.	Marlin Dean	Edge	Utah State	★★★	10*
4.	Jordan Ross	WR	Colorado State	★★★	527
5.	Jason Mitchell	S	San Diego State	★★★	649
6.	Danny O'Neil	QB	San Diego State	★★★	658
7.	Daylon Metoyer	OT	Boise State	★★★	56*
8.	Damarrion White	Edge	Fresno State	★★★	726
9.	Isaiah Buxton	CB	San Diego State	★★★	740
10.	Landon Bell	WR	Colorado State	★★★	742

**Junior college transfer/juco ranking*

AIR FORCE FALCONS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 77 | MWC PREDICTION: 4 | 2023 RECORD: 9-4, 5-3 MWC

OFFENSE Quarterback John Busha takes control of an offense that has finished in the top two nationally in rushing yards in each of the past four years. He showed good command of Air Force's unique attack during spring ball. Busha is not the classic run-first option quarterback, showing more of a proclivity for passing the ball.

Running backs Dylan Carson (493 yards) and Aiden Calvert (177 yards, four TDs) will primarily man the fullback and tailback spots for the Falcons. Calvert worked out at fullback some in the spring.

Air Force led the nation with 20.1 yards per reception but averaged only eight pass attempts per game. Wide receiver Jared Roznos is back after averaging 31.2 yards per catch on his 12 receptions. He had 374 yards and three TDs from his wideout spot. Cade Harris also returns in the slot, but all three tight ends and all five starting offensive linemen need to be replaced. It looks like there will be three seniors and two juniors up front, with junior Costen Cooley taking over the all-important center spot.

DEFENSE Eight starters are gone from a unit that ranked sixth in the nation in total defense at 277.7 yards per game. It was the fourth straight season the Falcons ranked in the top six nationally in that category.

The secondary will be the strength of the unit initially, as cornerbacks Jamari Bellamy and Jerome Gaillard Jr. both started last season and will be All-Mountain West candidates in 2024. Free safety Camby Goff returns after missing last season with an Achilles injury.

Osaro Aihie and Zach Juckel give the coaches confidence at inside linebacker, but finding two new outside backers will be a competition that will last into the fall.

Nose guard Payton Zdroik will compete for all-league honors after making 6.5 tackles for a loss as a junior. James Tomasi is also an experienced interior lineman, but the defensive ends will be learning on the job.

SPECIALISTS Matthew Dapore will kick field goals for the third straight year and was honorable mention All-MWC after going 15-for-19 last season. The punter duties were shared by Carson Bay and Luke Freer, and it remains to be seen if one will seize the job this fall.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Falcons' departed senior class left behind a legacy consisting of 40 wins in four seasons. Can head coach Troy Calhoun keep the magic rolling with almost an entirely new cast? Since 2014, Air Force has averaged just under nine wins per season (excluding the six-game 2020 season). With a new QB, new offensive line and a majority of new players on defense, hitting that number will be a challenge this fall.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Merrimack
Sept. 7	San José State
Sept. 14	at Baylor
Sept. 28	at Wyoming
Oct. 5	Navy
Oct. 12	at New Mexico
Oct. 19	Colorado State
Nov. 2	at Army
Nov. 9	Fresno State
Nov. 16	Oregon State
Nov. 23	at Nevada
Nov. 30	at San Diego St.

2023 RESULTS (9-4, 5-3 MWC)

Sept. 2	Robert Morris	W	42-7
Sept. 9	at Sam Houston	W	13-3
Sept. 15	Utah State	W	39-21
Sept. 22	at San José State	W	45-20
Sept. 30	San Diego State	W	49-10
Oct. 14	Wyoming	W	34-27
Oct. 21	at Navy	W	17-6
Oct. 28	at Colorado State	W	30-13
Nov. 4	vs. Army #	L	3-23
Nov. 11	at Hawaii	L	13-27
Nov. 18	UNLV	L	27-31
Nov. 24	at Boise State	L	19-27
Dec. 23	vs. James Madison%	W	31-21

#Denver %Armed Forces Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Benjamin Rosa, OT	★★★
2.	Tyson McCrary, CB	★★★
3.	Laird Hanson-Felter, DL	★★★
4.	Christian Sabsook, WR	★★★
5.	Taiwo Atunrase, S	★★★
6.	Jax Gates, CB	★★★
7.	Jonah Dawson, WR	★★★
8.	Noah McNair, WR	★★★
9.	Ryan Perry, EDGE	★★★
10.	Jayden Malbranche, S	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Troy Calhoun • Record at School: 130-82 (17 years) • Career Record: 130-82 (17 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Mike Thiessen • Defensive Coordinator: Brian Knorr • Location: Air Force Academy, Colo.
Stadium: Falcon Stadium (46,692)

Payton Zdroik

SCOUTING THE FALCONS

"They're sort of automatic now. You know what you're getting, and you know they're going to grind you up with that run scheme. ... They were red hot and the conference favorites before [quarterback Zac] Larrier went down [with a knee injury in an October win over Wyoming]. Because they're a service academy, you don't have the portal situation, so you have a good idea of their returning talent, which is thin this time. Expect a down season, at least compared to when they were healthy early last year, but they're such a machine that it's a high floor."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	21	**CADE HARRIS (SR.)**	6	Cameron Breier (Sr.)
WR	13	**JARED ROZNOS (SR.)**	2	Brandon Engel (Sr.)
LT	73	Luke Vonderhaar (Jr.)	78	Trevor Tate (Jr.)
LG	71	Michael McAninch (Sr.)	75	Alec Fauk (So.)
C	67	Costen Cooley (Jr.)	57	Gabriel Averitt (Jr.)
RG	54	Jackson Kohal (Sr.)	66	Jace Sutulovich (Jr.)
RT	76	Alex Moore (Sr.)	65	Samuel Floysand (Jr.)
TE	88	Bruin Fleischmann (Jr.)	87	Parker Menefee (Jr.)
QB	3	John Busha (Jr.)	10	Quinten Hayes (So.)
FB	5	Dylan Carson (Jr.)	37	Terrence Gist (Jr.)
TB	28	Aiden Calvert (Sr.)	8	Christopher Frew (Jr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	10	Jack Curtis (Jr.)	47	Luke Meyer (So.)
NG	96	**PAYTON ZDROIK (SR.)**	62	James Tomasi (Sr.)
DT	99	Aidan Swartz (Jr.)	95	Daniel Grobe (Jr.)
OLB	18	Elijiah Sanders (Sr.)	58	Jackson Adams (Jr.)
ILB	8	Osaro Aihie (Sr.)	54	Are'an Burr (Jr.)
ILB	46	Zach Juckel (Jr.)	44	Grant Uyl (Sr.)
SPUR	11	**CAMBY GOFF (SR.)**	23	Lincoln Tuioti-Mariner (So.)
CB	3	**JAMARI BELLAMY (SR.)**	5	K.C. Beard (Sr.)
CB	22	**JEROME GAILLARD JR. (SR.)**	0	Trey Williams (Sr.)
SS	9	Levi Brown (Jr.)	20	Kyle Chen (So.)
FS	7	Jake Martin (Sr.)	42	Jakobi McGowan (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	43	Matthew Dapore (Sr.)	KR	21	Cade Harris (Sr.)
P	95	Carson Bay (Sr.)	PR	21	Cade Harris (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Tommy Gilligan-USA TODAY Sports

Ashton Jeanty

SCOUTING THE BRONCOS

"It's hard to say they're taking a risk on [Spencer] Danielson when they're coming off a conference title, but there's a lot of questions in the league about whether or not he's the guy to bring them back to that [Bryan] Harsin, [Chris] Petersen, automatic level of conference champion contender year in and year out. [RB Ashton] Jeanty is a guy who can be the heart of their team — stopping him from the portal was a massive win — and the other RB could be just as good. The USC transfer [Malachi Nelson] will be their starting quarterback; he's the most talented in that room. ... Having [OC Dirk] Koetter around can really help Danielson grow into that role. This is still the best program for recruiting and developing talent in the league."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	17	Prince Strachan (So.)	83	Chris Marshall (Jr.)
WR	3	**LATRELL CAPLES (SR.)**	13	Chase Penry (Jr.)
WR	81	Austin Bolt (Sr.)	80	Cam Camper (Sr.)
LT	77	**KAGE CASEY (SO.)**	70	Kyle Cox (Fr.)
LG	66	**BEN DOOLEY (SR.)**	78	Tyler Keinath (Jr.)
C	63	**MASON RANDOLPH (JR.)**	67	Jason Steele (Fr.)
RG	62	**ROGER CARREON (SO.)**	57	Nathan Cardona (Sr.)
RT	65	Hall Schmidt (So.)	76	Rick Moore (Jr.)
TE	85	**MATT LAUTER (JR.)**	86	Matt Wagner (Fr.)
QB	7	Malachi Nelson (Fr.)	4	Maddux Madsen (So.)
RB	2	**ASHTON JEANTY (JR.)**	1	Jambres Dubar (So.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	91	**AHMED HASSANEIN (SR.)**	52	Tavion Woodard (Sr.)
NT	98	**HERBERT GUMS (SR.)**	94	Sheldon Newton (Sr.)
DT	90	**BRAXTON FELY (JR.)**	92	Michael Callahan (Sr.)
EDGE	40	Jayden Virgin-Morgan (So.)	54	Gabe Hunter (Sr.)
MLB	53	Marco Notarainni (Jr.)	43	Jake Ripp (So.)
WLB	10	**ANDREW SIMPSON (JR.)**	22	Chase Martin (So.)
FC	21	**A'MARION McCOY (SR.)**	16	Franklyn Johnson Jr. (Fr.)
BC	24	Jeremiah Earby (Jr.)	8	Markel Reed (Sr.)
NB	23	**SEYI OLADIPO (SR.)**	14	Kaonohi Kaniho (Sr.)
BS	34	**ALEXANDER TEUBNER (SR.)**	31	Zion Washington (Jr.)
FS	20	Ty Benefield (So.)	4	Rodney Robinson (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	35	Jonah Dalmas (Sr.)	KR	3 Latrell Caples (Sr.)
P	46	James Ferguson-Reynolds (Jr.)	PR	13 Chase Perry (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Brian Losness-USA TODAY Sports

BOISE STATE BRONCOS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 36 | MWC PREDICTION: 1 | 2023 RECORD: 8-6, 6-2 MWC

OFFENSE On paper, it's possible that the Broncos could have a 5-star quarterback throwing to a 5-star wide receiver, with a Heisman-level running back leading the run game.

Highly touted USC transfer Malachi Nelson was QB1 during spring practice, but he will still have to officially win the job from Maddux Madsen in the fall. Madsen missed the spring due to injury but will get a chance to run new coordinator Dirk Koetter's offense in fall camp.

Either QB will be thankful to have Mountain West Conference Player of the Year Ashton Jeanty at running back. Jeanty was seventh in the nation at 112.3 rushing yards per game, and he led the nation in yards from scrimmage per game at 159.7. He also scored 19 touchdowns.

In front of him, four starters return on the offensive line, including sophomore left tackle Kage Casey, who was a freshman All-American and did not surrender a sack.

The wide receiver room will be deep and includes former 5-star Chris Marshall, who ran into off-the-field troubles at both Texas A&M and Ole Miss. Boise State will likely be his last chance. Prince Strachan and Austin Bolt are two others who have the speed to get deep.

DEFENSE Edge Ahmed Hassanein racked up 12.5 sacks last season, good for second in the MWC, and he should again be in line for first-team All-MWC honors. Jayden Virgin-Morgan is another defensive end who coaches expect will contend for league honors.

At linebacker, Andrew Simpson returns after being voted second-team All-MWC. He's an elite athlete who still has room to improve. The heady Marco Notarainni is back after getting injured late last season, and Jake Ripp is a young linebacker to watch.

In the secondary, three of five starters are back, including corner A'Marion McCoy, who led the team with three interceptions. Transfer Jeremiah Earby, who started at Cal in 2023, will line up at the other corner.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Jonah Dalmas has a shot at becoming the NCAA's all-time leader in field goals, needing 18 to set the record. He has kicked 24, 23 and 26 the last three seasons, respectively. Punter James Ferguson-Reynolds was second in the nation with a 49.7-yard average.

FINAL ANALYSIS Boise State fired Andy Avalos after 10 games last year, but the Broncos rallied under Spencer Danielson to reach the Mountain West title game. The Broncos have a shot at the Group of 5's playoff spot if they can get production out of the quarterback and navigate a schedule that features Oregon, Washington State and Oregon State in the non-conference.

2023 RESULTS (8-6, 6-2 MWC)

Sept. 2	at Washington	L	19-56
Sept. 9	UCF	L	16-18
Sept. 16	North Dakota	W	42-18
Sept. 22	at San Diego State	W	34-31
Sept. 30	at Memphis	L	32-35
Oct. 7	San José State	W	35-27
Oct. 14	at Colorado State	L	30-31
Oct. 28	Wyoming	W	32-7
Nov. 4	at Fresno State	L	30-37
Nov. 11	New Mexico	W	42-14
Nov. 18	at Utah State	W	45-10
Nov. 24	Air Force	W	27-19
Dec. 2	at UNLV #	W	44-20
Dec. 16	vs. UCLA %	L	22-35

#MW Championship %LA Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at GA Southern
Sep. 7	at Oregon
Sep. 21	Portland State
Sep. 28	Washington St.
Oct. 5	Utah State
Oct. 12	at Hawaii
Oct. 26	at UNLV
Nov. 2	San Diego State
Nov. 9	Nevada
Nov. 16	at San José St.
Nov 23	at Wyoming
Nov 30	Oregon State

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Chris Marshall, WR	★★★★
2.	Sire Gaines, LB	★★★
3.	Daylon Metoyer, OT	★★★
4.	Joseph Marsh, LB	★★★
5.	Dylan Riley, RB	★★★
6.	Treyvon Tolmaire, CB	★★★
7.	Cameron Bates, WR	★★★
8.	Eyitayo Omotinugbon, OL	★★★
9.	Clay Martineau, LB	★★★
10.	Kaleb Annett, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Spencer Danielson • Record at School: 3-1 (1 year) Career Record: 3-1 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinators: Dirk Koetter, Nate Potter • Defensive Coordinators: Erik Chinander, Tyler Stockton • Location: Boise, Id. • Stadium: Albertsons Stadium (36,363)

COLORADO STATE RAMS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 78 | MWC PREDICTION: 5 | 2023 RECORD: 5-7, 3-5 MWC

OFFENSE Colorado State lost All-America tight end Dallin Holker, but most of the other key contributors to the offense are back. Quarterback Brayden Fowler-Nicolosi started the final 11 games for Colorado State as a true freshman and completed 62 percent of his passes for 3,460 yards with 22 touchdowns and 16 interceptions. He led the MWC in passing yards per game at 288, but he was sixth in overall rating due to having the most interceptions. Reducing the number of picks is a priority for 2024.

Running back Justin Marshall emerged late last season, playing in only the final three games but exploding for 311 yards. He will be the clear No. 1 back, though Vann Schield, Kobe Johnson and incoming freshman Jalen Dupree all have significant upside. At wide receiver, Tory Horton returns after a first-team All-MWC season in which he was second in the league with 1,136 yards and eight touchdowns.

The offensive line returns three starters, including second-team All-MWC center Jacob Gardner, who has NFL potential.

DEFENSE Six starters are back for a unit that was eighth in the league in scoring defense a year ago. Strong safety Jack Howell was first-team All-MWC, and he will lead a veteran secondary. Henry Blackburn is another talented safety who could contend for all-league honors, and Dom Jones is a third returning starter on the backline.

At linebacker, Chase Wilson is the leader of the defense and was second on the team in tackles behind Howell. The athletic Buom Jock is poised for a breakout season next to Wilson.

On the defensive line, Nuer Gatkuoth will be a name to watch with MWC sack leader Mohamed Kamara gone. Seniors James Mitchell and Cam Bariteau will clog the middle after getting significant time last year.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Jordan Noyes, a native of England who will be 32 and a father of three when the season kicks off, will be back for another season. He was 15-of-19 on field goals with a long of 55 yards. Australian punter Paddy Turner averaged 43.3 yards last season with a long of 65.

FINAL ANALYSIS Colorado State went from three wins to five wins in head coach Jay Norvell's first two years, and a bowl game will be a logical next step for the Rams. They have not been to a bowl since 2017. There is plenty of talent and experience on offense, and Fowler-Nicolosi will have a year under his belt as the full-time starter. Horton's return at receiver is also big for the Rams. Defensively, the secondary is in position to improve from last year. The non-conference features Texas, Oregon State, Colorado, UTEP and Northern Colorado; a 3-2 mark in those five games would give the Rams a good shot to reach the postseason.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Texas
Sept. 7	Northern Colorado
Sept. 14	Colorado
Sept. 21	UTEP
Oct. 5	at Oregon State
Oct. 12	San José State
Oct. 19	at Air Force
Oct. 26	New Mexico
Nov. 2	at Nevada
Nov. 16	Wyoming
Nov. 23	at Fresno State
Nov. 30	Utah State

2023 RESULTS (5-7, 3-5 MWC)

Sept. 2	Washington State	L	24-50
Sept. 16	at Colorado (ot)	L	35-43
Sept. 23	at Middle Tennessee	W	31-23
Sept. 30	Utah Tech	W	41-20
Oct. 7	at Utah State	L	24-44
Oct. 14	Boise State	W	31-30
Oct. 21	at UNLV	L	23-25
Oct. 28	Air Force	L	13-30
Nov. 3	at Wyoming	L	15-24
Nov. 11	San Diego State	W	22-19
Nov. 18	Nevada	W	30-20
Nov. 25	at Hawaii	L	24-27

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dagan Myers, S	★★★
2.	Jordan Ross, WR	★★★
3.	Landon Bell, WR	★★★
4.	Jalen Dupree, RB	★★★
5.	Chance Harrison, S	★★★
6.	Kory Hall, WR	★★★
7.	Jaden Landrum, TE	★★★
8.	Tra'Jon Townsend, DL	★★★
9.	Donte Ferrell, WR	★★★
10.	A.J. Noland, S	★★★

*Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jay Norvell • Record at School: 8-16 (2 years) • Career Record: 41-42 (7 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Matt Mumme • Defensive Coordinator: Freddie Banks • Location: Fort Collins, Colo.
Stadium: Canvas Stadium (36,500)

Tory Horton

Michael Madrid-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE RAMS

"They were on the cusp of a breakout for a lot of last season and were a couple plays away from a bowl bid. They were better than the five wins, and they've done a really solid job recruiting and developing guys. The portal has been tougher on them because they've had some really solid dudes leave this cycle. ... If the quarterback [Brayden Fowler-Nicolosi] can cut down on turnovers, that can help them tremendously. He could be a gamer; having him back with the experience will help a ton. The running backs are solid. There's a way to build around Fowler-Nicolosi now that he said he's not leaving in the portal. They should improve this season and go bowling."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	6	Donovan Ollie (Sr.)	89	Jamari Person (So.)
WR	14	**TORY HORTON (SR.)**	24	Dawson Menegatti (Sr.)
WR	5	**DYLAN GOFFNEY (SR.)**	81	Dane Olson (Sr.)
LT	77	**SAVEYON HENDERSON (SR.)**	72	Christian Martin (Fr.)
LG	74	Tanner Morley (Fr.)	79	Altor Urionabarrenechea (Fr.)
C	75	**JACOB GARDNER (SR.)**	76	Keegan Hamilton (So.)
RG	68	**DREW MOSS (SR.)**	79	Altor Urionabarrenechea (Fr.)
RT	78	Aaron Karas (So.)	64	Bobby Lawrence (Sr.)
TE		Jaxxon Warren (So.)	10	Vincent Brown II (Sr.)
QB	16	**BRAYDEN FOWLER-NICOLOSI (SO.)**	8	Jackson Brousseau (Fr.)
RB	29	Justin Marshall (Fr.)	0	Kobe Johnson (Sr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	9	**NUER GATKUOTH (SO.)**	56	Kenyon Agurs (Fr.)
DT	91	James Mitchell (Sr.)	95	Tyler Quinn (Jr.)
DT	94	**CAM BARITEAU (SR.)**	66	Brycen Heil (Sr.)
DE	92	Mukendi Wa-Kalonji (Jr.)	39	DeAndre Gill Jr. (So.)
LB	30	**CHASE WILSON (SR.)**	23	Jaseim Mitchell (Jr.)
LB	49	Buom Jock (Fr.)	52	Rocco Schramm (So.)
CB	7	**DOM JONES (SR.)**	12	Dominic Morris (Sr.)
CB	1	Isaiah Essissima (Sr.)	3	Elias Larry (Sr.)
NB	15	Ayden Hector (Sr.)	12	Dominic Morris (Sr.)
SS	17	**JACK HOWELL (SR.)**	20	Jaylen Gardner (So.)
FS	11	**HENRY BLACKBURN (SR.)**	19	Tyrell Grayson Jr. (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	23	Jordan Noyes (Sr.)	KR	0	Kobe Johnson (Sr.)
P	41	Paddy Turner (Sr.)	PR	14	Tory Horton (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Mikey Keene

Cary Edmondson-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE BULLDOGS

"It all comes down to if [head coach Jeff] Tedford is going to retire or if he wants to keep going for a few more seasons. He's helped rebuild that place into a dominant program in the league, and if he's moving on, they need to get a succession plan together. ... They're recruiting California really well, so they're going to be good. That's how you know, when they've got a bunch of homegrown talent they can put through their development system. ... If they keep the quarterback healthy, they'll be at the top of the league again this year. ... Last year was a weird deal for them. I would bet they're more consistent in league play this year."

— An opposing MW assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	0	**MAC DALENA (SR.)**	4	Emoryie Edwards (Sr.)
WR	18	**JALEN MOSS (SO.)**	81	Jordan Brown (Sr.)
WR	5	Josiah Freeman (Jr.)	6	Tim Grear Jr. (Jr.)
LT	69	**JACOB SPOMER (SR.)**	77	Toreon Penright (Sr.)
LG	78	**OSMAR VELEZ (SR.)**	63	Daniel Taumalolo (Sr.)
C	51	**MOSE VAVAO (SR.)**	70	Matai Bell (So.)
RG	72	Eddie Fonua (So.)	74	Julian Polendo (Sr.)
RT	75	**BRAYLEN NELSON (SR.)**	71	Rolan Fullwood (Sr.)
TE	86	Jake Boust (Sr.)	17	Kamron Beachem (Jr.)
QB	1	**MIKEY KEENE (JR.)**	7	Jayden Mandal (Fr.)
RB	2	**MALIK SHERROD (SR.)**	33	Elijah Gilliam (Sr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	5	**DEVO BRIDGES (SR.)**	50	Charles Remlinger (Sr.)
DT	92	**GAVRIEL LIGHTFOOT (JR.)**	23	Jacob Holmes (Jr.)
DT	98	Kavika Baumgartner (Sr.)	90	Dupre Mendoza (Sr.)
DE	97	Jahzon Jacks (So.)	0	Korey Foreman (Jr.)
LB	9	**MALACHI LANGLEY (SR.)**	31	Phoenix Jackson (Jr.)
LB	44	Tuasivi Nomura (Sr.)	26	Tim Thomas (So.)
NB	8	Jalen Williams (Jr.)	24	Charlotin Charles (Jr.)
CB	1	**CAM LOCKRIDGE (SR.)**	15	Julian Neal (Jr.)
CB	3	**AL'ZILLION HAMILTON (JR.)**	28	Jomarion Briggs (So.)
S	32	**DEAN CLARK (SR.)**	10	Kosi Agina (Sr.)
S	22	Camryn Bracha (Sr.)	11	Jayden Davis (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	46	Dylan Lynch (Jr.)	KR	2 Malik Sherrod (Sr.)
P	49	Landon Ogles (Jr.)	PR	18 Jalen Moss (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

FRESNO STATE BULLDOGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 62 | MWC PREDICTION: 3 | 2023 RECORD: 9-4, 4-4 MWC

OFFENSE Quarterback Mikey Keene returns as the clear QB1 after a strong first season in Fresno during which he threw 24 touchdowns and completed 67 percent of his passes for 2,976 yards. The former UCF QB was the New Mexico Bowl Offensive MVP.

At running back is Malik Sherrod, who was fifth in the Mountain West in yards from scrimmage with 966 rushing yards and 260 receiving yards; he also scored 10 touchdowns. Sherrod will be even more of a workhorse this year as a three-down back.

At wide receiver, the Bulldogs return two of the four pass-catchers with at least 500 yards last season. The athletic Jalen Moss should contend for all-conference honors at WR1, and Mac Dalena is a capable veteran.

The offensive line, which has struggled somewhat as of late, returns four starters and could be a potential area of strength in 2024. Second-team All-MWC guard Mose Vavao is sliding into the center spot, and left tackle Jacob Spomer returns after an honorable mention All-MWC season.

DEFENSE Two starters are back on the front line of a unit that finished No. 97 in the nation in rushing defense. Veteran defensive end Devo Bridges is the leader, and junior defensive tackle Gavriel Lightfoot has been in the rotation since his freshman season. The highest-profile transfer into the program is defensive end Korey Foreman, the former No. 1 recruit in the nation who was a rotational player in his first two years at USC. Coaches are hoping to unlock his NFL potential.

Leading tackler Malachi Langley returns at linebacker with 50 games of experience. Another USC transfer, Tuasivi Nomura, will be a linebacker to watch. In the secondary, Cam Lockridge missed most of 2023 with an injury, allowing Al'Zillion Hamilton to get plenty of experience at the corner spot. Both will be back this season, along with safety Dean Clark.

SPECIALISTS Kicking is in good hands with Dylan Lynch, a Lou Groza semifinalist who was 24-for-30 on field goals for the season, including 9-for-12 from beyond 40. The punting duties will likely go to redshirt freshman Nick Verdugo. Sherrod had a 95-yard kickoff return for a touchdown last season and may claim kick return duties again.

FINAL ANALYSIS If Keene continues to progress, the offense will be in good hands with the talent at the skill positions. Defensively, improvement is needed from a group that gave up 30 points or more six times last season. The Bulldogs should be in the hunt for a conference title if they can survive the non-conference gauntlet and be healthy down the stretch.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Michigan
Sept. 7	Sacramento St.
Sept. 14	New Mexico St.
Sept. 21	at New Mexico
Sept. 28	at UNLV
Oct. 12	Washington St.
Oct. 19	at Nevada
Oct. 26	San José State
Nov. 2	Hawaii
Nov. 9	at Air Force
Nov. 23	Colorado State
Nov. 30	at UCLA

2023 RESULTS (9-4, 4-4 MWC)

Sept. 2	at Purdue	W	39-35
Sept. 9	Eastern Washington	W	34-31
Sept. 16	at Arizona State	W	29-0
Sept. 23	Kent State	W	53-10
Sept. 30	Nevada	W	27-9
Oct. 7	at Wyoming	L	19-24
Oct. 13	at Utah State	W	37-32
Oct. 28	UNLV	W	31-24
Nov. 4	Boise State	W	37-30
Nov. 11	at San José State	L	18-42
Nov. 18	New Mexico	L	17-25
Nov. 25	at San Diego State	L	18-33
Dec. 16	vs. New Mexico St.#	W	37-10

#New Mexico Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Ethan Dasmann, OT	★★★
2.	Damarrion White, EDGE	★★★
3.	Marshel Sanders, WR	★★★
4.	Marsel Atkins, OL	★★★
5.	Bryson Donelson, RB	★★★
6.	Logan Studt, LB	★★★
7.	Jordan Pierro, ATH	★★★
8.	Jakari Embry, CB	★★★
9.	Loyall Mouzon, CB	★★★
10.	Kiontre Harris, ATH	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Tedford • Record at School: 45-22 (5 years) • Career Record: 127-79 (16 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Pat McCann • Defensive Coordinator: Kevin Coyle • Location: Fresno, Calif.
Stadium: Valley Children's Stadium (40,727)

HAWAI'I RAINBOW WARRIORS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 98 | MWC PREDICTION: 9 | 2023 RECORD: 5-8, 3-5 MWC

OFFENSE Timmy Chang's third season at Hawai'i will feature his second season with a full commitment to the run-and-shoot offense. The Rainbow Warriors had a multiple set in Year 1, but last year, it was all run-and-shoot, and the result was a national ranking of No. 27 in passing offense, No. 132 in rushing and No. 108 in scoring. There is optimism that the scoring will increase, thanks to a ton of experience at the skill positions.

Timing is critical for the quarterback and four receivers, and all are experienced. QB Brayden Schager will start for the third straight season after throwing for 26 touchdowns and 14 interceptions last year. He completed 63 percent of his passes and averaged 272 yards per game. Wide receiver Steven McBride was a second-team All-Mountain West selection after catching 63 passes for 1,024 yards and nine touchdowns. Pofele Ashlock (832 yards), Koali Nishigaya (322 yards) and Alex Perry (277 yards) all return as well.

The offensive line has three starters back, including Luke Felix-Fualalo and Ka'ena Decambra, but they may be changing positions, so the line could be a work in progress, especially early in the season.

DEFENSE Dennis Thurman takes over as defensive coordinator after spending 2023 on Deion Sanders' staff in Colorado. Thurman has 16 years of NFL experience, including four seasons as a defensive coordinator with the Jets and Bills. He will have a lot to work with in the secondary with all-league candidates Cam Stone at cornerback and Peter Manuma at safety. Two other starters also return on the backline.

The front seven will have a new look with no starters back along the defensive line. The linebacking corps welcomes the return of Logan Taylor, who led the team in tackles in 2022 before missing the majority of 2023 with injury. Jalen Smith also returns at linebacker.

SPECIALISTS Hawai'i must replace Matthew Shipley, who handled both the punting and placekicking duties last season. Ben Falck is in line to become the new punter, while the kicker will be determined in fall camp. Stone and Nishigaya will handle the kickoff and punt returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Chang has shown modest improvement from three wins to five in his first two seasons. Now the challenge is to lift Hawai'i to a bowl game. The Warriors have just 12 games this year rather than the standard 13, and there are two FCS teams on the slate, meaning that Hawai'i must beat five of its 10 FBS opponents to get to the postseason. The play along both the offensive and defensive lines will ultimately determine if Hawai'i gets back to a bowl for the first time since 2020.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 24	Delaware State
Aug. 31	UCLA
Sept. 14	at Sam Houston
Sept. 21	Northern Iowa
Oct. 5	at San Diego St.
Oct. 12	Boise State
Oct. 19	at Washington St.
Oct. 26	Nevada
Nov. 2	at Fresno State
Nov. 9	UNLV
Nov. 16	at Utah State
Nov. 30	New Mexico

2023 RESULTS (5-8, 3-5 MWC)

Aug. 26	at Vanderbilt	L	28-35
Sept. 1	Stanford	L	24-37
Sept. 9	Albany	W	31-20
Sept. 16	at Oregon	L	10-55
Sept. 23	New Mexico State	W	20-17
Sept. 30	at UNLV	L	20-44
Oct. 14	San Diego State	L	34-41
Oct. 21	at New Mexico	L	21-42
Oct. 28	San José State	L	0-35
Nov. 4	at Nevada	W	27-14
Nov. 11	Air Force	W	27-13
Nov. 18	at Wyoming	L	9-42
Nov. 25	Colorado State	W	27-24

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jarvis Heimuli, WR	★★★
2.	Frank Abreu, WR	★★★
3.	Christian Perry, OT	★★★
4.	Nazaiah Caravallo, LB	★★★
5.	Armando Lewis, WR	★★★
6.	Christian Vaughn, RB	★★★
7.	Noah Wily, LB	★★★
8.	Alika Cavaco-Amoy, LB	★★★
9.	Tristan Waiamau-Galindo, EDGE	★★★
10.	Jay Tauala-Harris, OL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Timmy Chang • Record at School: 8-18 (2 years) • Career Record: 8-18 (2 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Dan Morrison • Defensive Coordinator: Dennis Thurman • Location: Honolulu, Hawaii
Stadium: Clarence T.C. Ching Athletics Complex (16,909)

Brayden Schager

SCOUTING THE RAINBOW WARRIORS

"This is the hardest job in the league and probably one of the hardest in the country. We hear chatter about [Timmy] Chang being in trouble, and man, that seems crazy.... They made changes to both coordinators, probably to just get some news ideas in there. It's hard to get assistants to the island who don't have a connection to Hawai'i. You're balancing having a head coach and staff who understand how to deal with those obstacles, but you still have to bring in fresh ideas and concepts. ... [QB Brayden] Schager is a fearless guy, you can see him really rally that offense, but there's no balance and he's usually on his back. They could flip the script on offense if they can keep him on his feet."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	7	**STEVEN MCBRIDE (SR.)**	1	Jonah Panoke (Sr.)
WR	4	Alex Perry (So.)	11	Karsyn Pupunu (Sr.)
WR	0	**POFELE ASHLOCK (SO.)**	3	Nick Cenacle (Jr.)
WR	23	**KOALI NISHIGAYA (SR.)**	8	Tamatoa Mokiao-Atimalala (Sr.)
LT	72	**LUKE FELIX-FUALALO (SR.)**	73	Isaac Maugaleoo (Fr.)
LG	66	**SERGIO MUASAU (SR.)**	77	Arasi Mose (Sr.)
C	57	Ethan Spencer (So.)	75	KT Carter (Fr.)
RG	51	Maurice Ta'ala (Sr.)	76	Fred Pelling (So.)
RT	78	**KA'ENA DECAMBRA (JR.)**	70	James Milovale (Jr.)
QB	13	**BRAYDEN SCHAGER (SR.)**	5	Jake Farrell (Sr.)
RB	2	Tylan Hines (Jr.)	30	Landon Sims (Jr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	5	Tariq Jones (Jr.)	28	Vaifanua Peko (Fr.)
DT	69	Daniel Williams (Sr.)	10	Patrick Hisatake (So.)
DE	52	Ezra Evaimalo (Sr.)	19	Dion Washington (Jr.)
EDGE	0	Elijah Robinson (Sr.)	12	Wynden Ho'ohuli (Jr.)
LB	16	**LOGAN TAYLOR (SR.)**	18	Noah Kema (Sr.)
LB	3	**JALEN SMITH (JR.)**	54	Jamih Otis (So.)
CB	4	**CAM STONE (SR.)**	13	Caleb Brown (Sr.)
CB	23	**VIRDEL EDWARDS II (SR.)**	24	Devyn King (Sr.)
DB	9	**ELIJAH PALMER (SO.)**	27	Makana Meyer (So.)
SS	1	**PETER MANUMA (JR.)**	25	Matagi Thompson (So.)
FS	7	**MEKI PEI (SR.)**	6	Justin Sinclair (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	33	Kai Kluth (Fr.)	KR	4	Cam Stone (Sr.)
P	69	Ben Falck (Sr.)	PR	7	Steven McBride (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Craig Strobeck-USA TODAY Sports

Sean Dollars

SCOUTING THE WOLF PACK

"Jeff Choate is a great coach; he was crucial to helping get Texas turned around and into a national title contender, and he understands this level of football. But this is a really hard job, and it's not getting easier. The university does not support football at the level of the upper-half programs in this league. How are they going to develop if they get picked apart by NIL in the portal? They've brought a lot of guys in this offseason, and I'm betting they're more talented come fall, but there's a ton of work to be done. This has not been a competitive Group of 5 program for a long time."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	8	Cortez Braham Jr. (Sr.)	12	Nate Burleson II (Fr.)
WR	7	Marquis Ashley (Jr.)	12	Nate Burleson II (Fr.)
WR	9	Marshaun Brown (Fr.)	12	Nate Burleson II (Fr.)
LT	70	**ISAIAH WORLD (JR.)**	77	John Bolles (Jr.)
LG	52	Tyson Ruffins (Fr.)	53	Spencer Lovell (Sr.)
C	78	**ANDREW MADRIGAL (JR.)**	52	Tyson Ruffins (Fr.)
RG	54	Josh Grabowski (Jr.)	53	Spencer Lovell (Sr.)
RT	71	Josiah Timoteo (Fr.)	55	Snoop Leota-Amaama (So.)
TE	34	Andrew Savaiinaea (So.)		Jace Henry (Sr.)
QB	2	**BRENDON LEWIS (JR.)**	10	AJ Bianco (So.)
RB	4	**SEAN DOLLARS (SR.)**	24	Patrick Garwo III (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	0	Henry Ikahihifo (Sr.)	95	Jonathan Maldanado (So.)
DT	55	Mackavelli Malotumau (Jr.)	43	Nelson Ropati (Jr.)
DT	66	**THOMAS WITTE (SR.)**	43	Nelson Ropati (Jr.)
DE	2	Kaden Johnson (Sr.)	90	Ike Nnakenyi (So.)
LB	32	**DRUE WATTS (JR.)**	44	Austin Harnetiaux (So.)
LB	36	**TONGIAKI MATEIALONA (SR.)**	16	Keleo Neves (Sr.)
STAR	1	**CAINE SAVAGE (SR.)**	6	Davis Mallinger (Jr.)
CB	3	Michael Coats Jr. (Sr.)	24	Chad Brown (Sr.)
CB	10	**KK MEIER (SO.)**	8	Nathaneal Floyd (Sr.)
S	46	Aedan Seiuli (Jr.)	5	Keyshawn Cobb (Sr.)
S	4	Kitan Crawford (Sr.)	28	Tori Daffin (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	18	Matthew Killam (Sr.)	KR	26 Ashton Hayes (So.)
P	39	Guy Gillespie (Jr.)	PR	4 Kitan Crawford (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Milo Gladstein/The Coloradoan

NEVADA WOLF PACK

NATIONAL FORECAST: 120 | MWC PREDICTION: 12 | 2023 RECORD: 2-10, 2-6 MWC

OFFENSE New Wolf Pack head coach Jeff Choate feels good about his quarterbacks room. Brendon Lewis has the early lead on the starting job again coming out of spring ball after improving his decision-making. AJ Bianco, who eventually took Lewis' job in 2023, is running No. 2, but former Florida State and Nebraska quarterback Chubba Purdy (Brock's brother) was healthy for the final week of spring and will compete in the fall as well.

At running back, returning starter Sean Dollars ran for 527 yards and six TDs last year and will share the primary carries with Pat Garwo III, a sixth-year senior transfer from Boston College who had a 1,000-yard season for the Eagles in 2021.

The wide receiver room will feature some transfers. Cortez Braham Jr. (West Virginia) played sparingly for the Mountaineers, but he looks like the No. 1 option. Marshaun Brown had a solid spring game.

Left tackle Isiah World is the top offensive lineman and an all-league candidate in a group that has some experience.

DEFENSE Sixth-year defensive end Henry Ikahihifo is an athletic edge who will be an all-league candidate thanks to his ability to disrupt the offense and rush the passer. The former tight end is in his second stint with Nevada and also spent a year at Cal. The other end, Kaden Johnson, had a strong spring after playing in 35 games the last four years at Wisconsin. The Wolf Pack are looking for depth on the interior behind Thomas White and Mackavelli Malotumau.

The two starting linebackers return in Drue Watts and Tongiaki Mateialona, the two leading returning tacklers.

A player to watch on the backline is Kitan Crawford, who came over from Texas with Choate after developing into an elite special-teams player. for the Longhorns The secondary is experienced and should be the strength of the defense.

SPECIALISTS Matthew Killam will take over the placekicking duties after handling primarily kickoffs for Nevada in 2023. Punter Guy Gillespie is a junior college transfer who averaged 39.9 yards per kick. Crawford, who blocked a punt and field goal in his career at Texas, will be given an opportunity to return punts, while running back Ashton Hayes will return kicks.

FINAL ANALYSIS Nevada is rebuilding, and while the team may improve, the won-loss record may not thanks to a difficult schedule that features five non-conference games against bowl teams. The wide receivers are an unknown, and Choate is trying to develop youth along both lines. A bowl game appears to be at least a year away.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 24	SMU
Aug. 31	at Troy
Sept. 7	Georgia Southern
Sept. 14	at Minnesota
Sept. 21	E. Washington
Oct. 5	at San José St.
Oct. 12	Oregon State
Oct. 19	Fresno State
Oct. 26	at Hawaii
Nov. 2	Colorado State
Nov. 9	at Boise State
Nov. 23	Air Force
Nov. 30	at UNLV

2023 RESULTS (2-10, 2-6 MWC)

Sept. 2	at USC	L	14-66
Sept. 9	Idaho	L	6-33
Sept. 16	Kansas	L	24-31
Sept. 23	at Texas State	L	24-35
Sept. 30	at Fresno State	L	9-27
Oct. 14	UNLV	L	27-45
Oct. 21	at San Diego State	W	6-0
Oct. 28	New Mexico	W	34-24
Nov. 4	Hawaii	L	14-27
Nov. 11	at Utah State	L	24-41
Nov. 18	at Colorado State	L	20-30
Nov. 25	Wyoming	L	6-42

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Zaiden Wallace, DL	★★★
2.	Anthony Grigsby, QB	★★★
3.	Luke Farr, OT	★★★
4.	Dominik Ball, RB	★★★
5.	Nehemiah Burleson, EDGE	★★★
6.	David Paine Jr., DL	★★★
7.	Anthony Wolter, QB	★★★
8.	Roman Martin, CB	★★★
9.	Carter Vargas, RB	★★★
10.	Jaden McGill, RB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Choate • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 28-22 (4 seasons)
Offensive Coordinator: Mike Lynch • Defensive Coordinator: Kane Ioane • Location: Reno, Nev.
Stadium: Mackay Stadium (30,000)

NEW MEXICO LOBOS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 118 | MWC PREDICTION: 11 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 2-6 MWC

OFFENSE New Mexico's new staff is comfortable with its quarterback situation after Devon Dampier, last year's backup, had a strong spring. Last season, Dampier was 40-for-64 (63 percent) for 525 yards with six TDs and no interceptions spread out over nine games. He also rushed for 328 yards and four touchdowns. He is the clear QB1 heading into the fall.

At running back, Andrew Henry is the top returner after averaging 6.7 yards per carry. The Lobos will likely feature two other backs — transfers Javen Jacobs (Arizona State) and Eli Sanders (Iowa State).

The wide receiver room should be solid as well, with Caleb Medford leading the way. He was the go-to receiver by season's end. Ryan Davis is in the slot. Luke Wysong returns after missing most of last season with injury and he should be a major contributor. Tight end Trace Bruckler will also be another key target for Dampier.

The offensive line needs to be completely rebuilt after all five starters departed either through graduation or the transfer portal.

DEFENSE The defensive line was a position that struggled last season and needs to be shored up. Senior Kyler Drake is the top player up front and has the flexibility to play either on the edge or on the interior. Former Washington State transfer Gabriel Lopez also impressed in the spring, and Bryce Santana will be counted on to improve a run defense that finished No. 106 nationally last season.

At linebacker, Dimitri Johnson will be the quarterback in the middle. Mihalis Santorineos played a lot last season as a reserve, and Cal transfer Moso Tuitele adds depth.

The backfield will be the strength of the unit, led by Tavian Combs, an all-league candidate. Christian Ellis is another safety who has impressed the new staff. The corners are four deep with San Diego State transfer Noah Avinger, Edward Blacklock, Bobby Arnold III and Nigel Williams.

SPECIALISTS Luke Drzewiecki made 10-of-14 field goals last season, including 2-of-5 from beyond 40 yards, and he missed only one extra point. Punter Aaron Rodriguez had a 42.4-yard average and had 14 kicks of 50-plus yards. Wysong will handle return duties.

FINAL ANALYSIS New head coach Bronco Mendenhall has 17 years in the college game and has been bowl eligible in 16 of them. It might be tough to make it 17-for-18. The Lobos face Auburn, Arizona and Washington State in non-league play, though they do miss the three teams that finished atop the Mountain West standings in Boise State, UNLV and San José State. The offensive and defensive line play will determine whether Mendenhall's return after two years out of the game will result in a bowl.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 24	Montana State
Aug. 31	at Arizona
Sept. 14	at Auburn
Sept. 21	Fresno State
Sept. 28	at New Mexico St.
Oct. 12	Air Force
Oct. 19	at Utah State
Oct. 26	at Colorado St.
Nov. 2	Wyoming
Nov. 9	at San Diego St.
Nov. 16	Washington St.
Nov. 30	at Hawaii

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 2-6 MWC)

Sept. 2	at Texas A&M	L	10-52
Sept. 9	Tennessee Tech	W	56-10
Sept. 16	New Mexico State	L	17-27
Sept. 23	at Massachusetts (ot)	W	34-31
Sept. 30	at Wyoming	L	26-35
Oct. 14	San José State	L	24-52
Oct. 21	Hawaii	W	42-21
Oct. 28	at Nevada	L	24-34
Nov. 4	UNLV	L	14-56
Nov. 11	at Boise State	L	14-42
Nov. 18	at Fresno State	W	25-17
Nov. 24	Utah State (ot)	L	41-44

TOP 4 RECRUITS*

1. Elijah Brody, QB ★★★
2. Sa'Kylee Woodard, OL ★★★
3. D'Angelo Mayes, WR ★★★
4. John Sierra, LB ★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bronco Mendenhall • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 135-81 (17 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Jason Beck • Defensive Coordinator: Nick Howell • Location: Albuquerque, N.M.
Stadium: University Stadium (39,224)

Caleb Medford

Brian Losness-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE LOBOS

"[New head coach] Bronco [Mendenhall] makes a ton of sense at New Mexico, but this isn't an overnight fix at all. They've struggled in every phase of personnel; recruiting, developing, transfers, all of it. This is not a program with any kind of winning culture. ... Bronco was a defensive coordinator there, so he knows what he's walking into. He knows the league very well and can recruit the region beyond New Mexico. Expect the same defensive looks he's shown everyone else, and expect him to get in and fight recruiting battles back in Utah and California. ... Could this become something like [Jeff] Tedford at Fresno State? Maybe, if the university shows support. There's no reason this program should be as bad as they've been."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	**CALEB MEDFORD (JR.)**	Nic Trujillo (Fr.)
WR	Ryan Davis (Sr.)	Shawn Miller (So.)
WR	Luke Wysong (Jr.)	Isaiah Jones (Sr.)
LT	McKenzie Agnello (Sr.)	Travis Gray (So.)
LG	Isaiah Sillemon (Jr.)	Richard Pearce (Jr.)
C	Jawaun Singletary (Sr.)	Malik Aliane (So.)
RG	Tavien Ford (Sr.)	Matthew Toilolo (Fr.)
RT	Wallace Unamba (Jr.)	Jer'Marques Bailey (Jr.)
TE	**TRACE BRUCKLER (JR.)**	Magnus Geers (Sr.)
QB	Devon Dampier (So.)	Justin Holaday (Jr.)
RB	Andrew Henry (Sr.)	Javen Jacobs (So.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	**KYLER DRAKE (SR.)**	De'jon Benton (Sr.)
DT	Bryce Santana (Sr.)	**TYLER KIEHNE (JR.)**
DE	**GABRIEL LOPEZ (JR.)**	Ja'Shon Lowery (So.)
LB	**DIMITRI JOHNSON (SR.)**	Moso Tuitele (So.)
LB	Mihalis Santorineos (Jr.)	Hunter Haemker (So.)
LB	Jayden Wilson (So.)	Lucas Lucero (Jr.)
CB	Noah Avinger (Jr.)	Bobby Arnold III (So.)
CB	Edward Blacklock (Fr.)	Nigel Williams (Jr.)
S	Tavian Combs (Jr.)	Skylar Cook (Fr.)
S	**DERECK MOORE (SO.)**	Noa Pola-Gates (Sr.)
S	**CHRISTIAN ELLIS (FR.)**	David Murphy (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	Luke Drzewiecki (Jr.)	KR	Luke Wysong (Jr.)
P	Aaron Rodriguez (Sr.)	PR	Luke Wysong (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Kenan Christon

Orlando Ramirez-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE AZTECS

"[Head coach] Sean Lewis makes all the sense in the world here. New stadium, and they've been with defensive coaches for a long time. He's going to create a product there that's fun, that attracts the skill position players in SoCal. ... This could be the start of something really big, but I would check expectations in the first year. They've let a lot of guys jump in the portal who just don't work for what they do. They're still shopping for some pieces, too, and I think there's gonna be a defensive decline at first. But Sean and his staff are really good at moving fast, obviously, and that offense will come out ready to surprise teams."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)					
WR	3	Ja'Shaun Poke (Sr.)	85	Nate Bennett (Sr.)
WR	**83**	**MEKHI SHAW (SR.)**	11	Jerry McClure (Fr.)
WR	4	Louis Brown IV (Jr.)	80	Baylin Brooks (So.)
LT	70	Christian Jones (Jr.)	62	Kyle Stanback (Jr.)
LG	55	Brayden Bryant (Sr.)	**76**	**DEAN ABDULLAH (JR.)**
C	**63**	**ROSS ULUGALU-MASEULI (JR.)**	68	Ryan Silver (Fr.)
RG	**53**	**MYLES MURAO (JR.)**	76	Dean Abdullah (Jr.)
RT	74	Nate Williams (Sr.)	73	Jordan Sandlin (Jr.)
TE	18	Jude Wolfe (Sr.)	89	Logan Tanner (So.)
QB	10	AJ Duffy (So.)	16	Danny O'Neil (Fr.)
RB	**23**	**KENAN CHRISTON (SR.)**	2	Jaylan Armstead (Sr.)
DEFENSE (1)				
DE	32	Marlem Louis (Sr.)	96	Ryan Henderson (So.)
DT	97	Darrion Dalton (Jr.)	93	Brady Nassar (So.)
DT	**99**	**TUPU ALUALU (SR.)**	88	Brandon McElroy (Sr.)
DE	47	Trey White (So.)	30	Dominic Oliver (Jr.)
LB	59	Owen Chambliss (Fr.)	58	Cody Moon (Sr.)
LB	20	Tano Letuli (So.)	56	DJ Herman (Jr.)
CB	10	Bennett Walker (Sr.)	14	Bryce Phillips (Sr.)
CB	21	Chris Johnson (Jr.)	35	Jelani Whitmore (Sr.)
S	17	Deshawn McCuin (Sr.)	24	Josh Hunter (So.)
S	33	Dalesean Staley (Jr.)	11	JD Coffey III (Jr.)
S	34	Eric Butler (Jr.)	7	William Nimmo, Jr. (Sr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	46	Gabriel Plascencia (Jr.)	KR	23	Kenan Christon (Sr.)
P	98	Tyler Pastula (Sr.)	PR	83	Mekhi Shaw (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 95 | MWC PREDICTION: 8 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 2-6 MWC

OFFENSE There will be major changes as former Kent State head coach and Colorado offensive coordinator Sean Lewis comes to revive the San Diego State program after Brady Hoke's retirement. There are only five starters returning as Lewis implements a fast-paced offense that had Kent State ranked No. 4 in the FBS in total yards in 2021.

Running back Kenan Christon started for the Aztecs last season and will be the lead back again after putting up 579 yards from scrimmage. Jaylan Armstead had a team-best eight rushing touchdowns.

At quarterback, there will be a battle that will carry into fall camp. Florida State transfer AJ Duffy and true freshman Danny O'Neil fought it out in spring practice, with each showing promise. The quarterback in Lewis' system needs to be mobile, and both are dual threats.

At wide receiver, Ja'Shaun Poke played four years for Lewis at Kent State before spending one year at West Virginia. He is expected to be the Aztecs' most productive receiver. Senior Mekhi Shaw, San Diego State's leading wideout a year ago, is another player to watch. The offensive line has three starters back, and Akron transfer Nate Williams impressed during spring drills at right tackle.

DEFENSE The Aztecs are switching from a 3-3-5 to a 4-2-5 alignment that will feature three safeties. The depth on the line will be challenged with only one starter back from that unit. Defensive end Marlem Louis is a newcomer to watch as a two-year starter from FCS Richmond.

At linebacker, two transfers took over the position in spring drills. Owen Chambliss from Utah and Tano Letuli from Army should be steady players for defensive coordinator Eric Schmidt.

The trio of safeties will be led by Dalesean Staley, an FCS Northern Iowa transfer who is athletic and picked up the responsibilities quickly. Deshawn McCuin is a returning player who has battled injuries but looks ready to contribute. The best cover corner will be Bennett Walker.

SPECIALISTS The punting and kicking jobs were still up in the air during spring ball. Punter Tyler Pastula has four years of experience, with the last two coming at FCS UAlbany. Christon earned honorable mention All-Mountain West honors as a kick returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS With so many unknowns on both sides of the ball and a non-conference slate that features three former Pac-12 schools, reaching a bowl game might be the ceiling in Year 1 for Lewis. Between the new scheme and leftover skill-position talent, the offense should find a way to move the ball, but there are questions at all three levels on defense that need answers in the fall.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	TX A&M-Commerce
Sept. 7	Oregon State
Sept. 14	at California
Sept. 28	at C. Michigan
Oct. 5	Hawaii
Oct. 12	at Wyoming
Oct. 26	Washington St.
Nov. 2	at Boise State
Nov. 9	New Mexico
Nov. 16	at UNLV
Nov. 23	at Utah State
Nov. 30	Air Force

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 2-6 MWC)

Aug. 26	Ohio	W	20-13
Sept. 2	Idaho State	W	36-28
Sept. 9	UCLA	L	10-35
Sept. 16	at Oregon State	L	9-26
Sept. 22	Boise State	L	31-34
Sept. 30	at Air Force	L	10-49
Oct. 14	at Hawaii	W	41-34
Oct. 21	Nevada	L	0-6
Nov. 4	Utah State (ot)	L	24-32
Nov. 11	at Colorado State	L	19-22
Nov. 18	at San José State	L	13-24
Nov. 25	Fresno State	W	33-18

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jason Mitchell, S	★★★
2.	Danny O'Neil, QB	★★★
3.	Isaiah Buxton, CB	★★★
4.	Will Cianfrini, WR	★★★
5.	Anthony McMillian, RB	★★★
6.	Ryan Wolfer, TE	★★★
7.	Cincere Rhaney, RB	★★★
8.	Heath McRee, WR	★★★
9.	Arthur Ban, TE	★★★
10.	Kai Holec, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Sean Lewis • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 24-31 (5 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Sean Lewis • Defensive Coordinator: Eric Schmidt • Location: San Diego, Calif.
Stadium: Snapdragon Stadium (35,000)

SAN JOSÉ STATE SPARTANS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 117 | MWC PREDICTION: 10 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 6-2 MWC

OFFENSE Will the Spartans be running Navy's famed triple-option attack with former Midshipmen head coach Ken Niumatalolo taking over for Brent Brennan? The answer is no. New offensive coordinator Craig Stutzmann has labeled his attack the "Spread and Shred," which sounds nothing like the ground-oriented offense Niumatalolo employed for 15 years.

Who will lead this nifty-sounding offense has yet to be determined. Jay Butterfield was QB2 last year for San José State, throwing 11 passes in relief of first-team All-Mountain West QB Chevan Cordeiro. He has competition from Walker Eget, Tyler Voss, Emmett Brown and possibly a summer transfer as the staff implements a new system.

Projected starting running back Quali Conley transferred to Arizona. Jakob Galloway, who missed last season due to injury, is a player to watch in the backfield. Wide receiver Nick Nash heads a strong position group, and he could play his way into NFL Draft conversation.

The tight end group is deep, headed by Sam Olson and Skyler Loving-Black. The offensive line needs to be rebuilt after losing three starters to graduation and a fourth, Fernando Carmona Jr., to transfer (Arkansas).

DEFENSE The defense that ranked No. 44 in the nation will again be led by coordinator Derrick Odum, who was retained by Niumatalolo.

Gone, however, is the unit's only first-team All-MWC player in defensive lineman Tre Smith, who is now at Arizona. Soane Toia, who earned second-team honors himself, will lead the front line, but there are a lot of questions after that.

At linebacker, leading tackler Byron Parham departed for Washington, leaving Jordan Pollard and Jordan Cobbs, who returns after missing 2023 with injury, as the main cogs in the middle of the defense. In the secondary, the starting corners will be solid, with Michael Dansby and former Virginia Tech transfer DJ Harvey.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Kyler Halvorsen is back after making 10-of-15 field-goal attempts, but his long for the season was just 41 yards, so he is looking to add to his range. At punter, there is a two-man battle between former Colorado transfer Trent Carrizosa and Dino Beslagic.

FINAL ANALYSIS With 12 starters lost to graduation, another projected six starters transferring out and a new coaching staff, Year 1 of the Niumatalolo era may be a bit bumpy. Brennan established a solid foundation in the latter half of his tenure. While 2024 may be an adjustment period, this program has shown it can enjoy success when it has some momentum.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 29	Sacramento St.
Sept. 7	at Air Force
Sept. 14	Kennesaw State
Sept. 21	at Washington St.
Oct. 5	Nevada
Oct. 12	at Colorado St.
Oct. 19	Wyoming
Oct. 26	at Fresno State
Nov. 9	at Oregon State
Nov. 16	Boise State
Nov. 23	UNLV
Nov. 30	Stanford

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 6-2 MWC)

Aug. 26	at USC	L	28-56
Sept. 3	Oregon State	L	17-42
Sept. 9	Cal Poly	W	59-3
Sept. 16	at Toledo	L	17-21
Sept. 22	Air Force	L	20-45
Oct. 7	at Boise State	L	27-35
Oct. 14	at New Mexico	W	52-24
Oct. 21	Utah State	W	42-21
Oct. 28	at Hawaii	W	35-0
Nov. 11	Fresno State	W	42-18
Nov. 18	San Diego State	W	24-13
Nov. 25	at UNLV	W	37-31
Dec. 23	vs. Coastal Carolina#	L	14-24

#Hawaii Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Tevita Manukainiu, OT	★★★★
2.	Lamar Radcliffe, RB	★★★
3.	Gregory McClendon, ATH	★★★
4.	Manuel Serna, OT	★★★
5.	Marcellus Chandler, WR	★★★
6.	Malakai Hoeft, LB	★★★
7.	Jacob Stewart, TE	★★★
8.	Dorian Hale, QB	★★★
9.	Joseph Bey, ATH	★★★
10.	Mohammad Othman, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ken Niumatalolo • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 109-83 (15+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Craig Stutzmann • Defensive Coordinator: Derrick Odum • Location: San Jose, Calif.
Stadium: CEFCU Stadium (30,456)

Nick Nash

SCOUTING THE SPARTANS

"Ken [Niumatalolo] deserves a chance to show everyone what most coaches know; he's a really great football coach, and it doesn't have anything to do with the triple option. ... They're going run-and-shoot which could be a little bumpy on the install. It's gonna look like Hawaii and some of what Washington State used to do. ... They need to upgrade at offensive line and find the quarterback who's most comfortable the fastest. ... Defensively, I thought the last staff did a really good job developing guys. That's going to be their strength in Year 1, especially at linebacker and in the secondary."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	3	**NICK NASH (SR.)**	15	Matthew Coleman (So.)
WR	11	**JUSTIN LOCKHART (SR.)**	17	Cooper Hoch (Fr.)
WR	12	**MALIKHI MILLER (SR.)**		TreyShun Hurry (So.)
LT	70	Malik Williams (Jr.)		Mitchell Brown (Fr.)
LG	61	**MARIST TALAVOU (SR.)**	72	Nate Hale (Fr.)
C	75	Joe Harbert (So.)	67	Kai Davison (Jr-R.)
RG	78	Jake Steele (So.)	69	Uluakinofo Taliauli (So)
RT	77	Luke Griskey (Fr.)	72	Nate Hale (Fr.)
TE	88	Sam Olson (Sr.)	86	Skyler Loving-Black (Sr.)
QB	9	Jay Butterfield (Jr.)		Emmett Brown (So.)
RB	28	Jakob Galloway (So.)		Floyd Chalk IV (Jr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	50	Gafa Faga (Jr.)	37	Dylan Hampsten (Fr.)
NG	42	**SOANE TOIA (SR.)**	50	Akio Martinson (Fr.)
DE	48	Dejon Roney (Jr.)	23	Justin Stearns (So.)
OLB	41	Taniela Latu (Sr.)	26	Ethan Powell (Jr.)
ILB	10	**JORDAN POLLARD (JR.)**	35	Charles Rogers (Sr.)
ILB	44	Jordan Cobbs (Sr.)	97	John Norwood (So.)
CB	43	Jalen Bainer (Jr.)	31	Hunter Nowell (Fr.)
CB	25	Michael Dansby (Jr.)	17	Zavion Reese (Jr.)
CB	2	DJ Harvey (Jr.)	31	Hunter Nowell (Fr.)
S	29	Jalen Apalit-Williams (Jr.)		Robert Rahimi (Sr.)
S	20	Isiah Revis (Jr.)		Larry Turner-Gooden (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	11	Kyler Halvorsen (Sr.)	KR	23	Jabari Bates (So.)
P		Trent Carrizosa (So.)	PR	2	DJ Harvey (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Gary A. Vasquez-USA TODAY Sports

Ricky White III

Joe Camporeale-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE REBELS

"They would be an easy team to pencil in for the conference title if [quarterback] Jayden [Maiava] hadn't transferred. They're still strong on offense so long as they can get one of the transfer QBs up to speed. The Holy Cross QB [Matthew Sluka] is probably their best option. ...[Head coach Barry] Odom just reworked his deal, but if they can show out again this year with [OC Brennan Marion's] offense, we think he's gone, maybe to Arkansas. ... They're starting to pay off in recruiting offensive skill players at the high school level and transfers. That system is attractive, and they could be even better on that side of the ball. Even losing the QB, they could still make a run at the conference title."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	11	**RICKY WHITE III (SR.)**	84	Corey Thompson Jr. (So.)
WR	21	Jacob De Jesus (Sr.)	10	DeAngelo Irvin Jr. (So.)
WR	1	Casey Cain (Jr.)	82	Rashawn Jackson (Fr.)
LT	75	**ANTON AMBUEHL (JR.)**	71	Ed Haynes (Fr.)
LG	74	**JALEN ST. JOHN (SR.)**	72	Will Thomas (So.)
C	65	**JACK HASZ (SR.)**	61	Graham Keeting III (Jr.)
RG	79	Austin Boyd (So.)	78	Mathyus Su'a (Sr.)
RT	70	**TIGER SHANKS (SR.)**	77	Michael Bareman (Sr.)
TE	19	Kaleo Ballungay (Sr.)	87	Christian Earls (Jr.)
QB	6	Hajj-Malik Williams (Sr.)	7	Cameron Friel (Sr.)
RB	9	Jai'Den Thomas (So.)	5	Greg Burrell (Fr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	50	**JALEN DIXON (SR.)**	99	Keith Conley Jr. (Sr.)
DT	97	Clay Patterson (Sr.)	91	Cooper Webb (Sr.)
DT	95	Alexander Whitmore (Sr.)	98	**TATUO MARTINSON (SR.)**
DE	2	Antonio Doyle Jr. (Sr.)	28	Fisher Camac (So.)
LB	38	**MARSEL MCDUFFIE (JR.)**	16	Mani Powell (Jr.)
LB	7	**JACKSON WOODARD (SR.)**	53	Blesyng Alualu-Tuiolemotu (Fr.)
NB	9	**JETT ELAD (SR.)**	6	Jeremiah Vessel (So)
CB	5	**CAMERON OLIVER (SR.)**	0	Tony Grimes (Sr.)
CB	4	Malik Chavis (Sr.)	24	LaDarrius Bishop (Sr.)
SS	1	Jalen Catalon (Sr.)	20	Trenton Holloway (Sr.)
FS	3	**JOHNATHAN BALDWIN (SR.)**	14	Jah'Von Grigsby (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	83	Andre Meono (Jr.)	KR	21 Jacob De Jesus (Sr.)
P	90	Marshall Nichols (Jr.)	PR	21 Jacob De Jesus (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

UNLV REBELS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 61 | MWC PREDICTION: 2 | 2023 RECORD: 9-5, 6-2 MWC

OFFENSE UNLV offensive coordinator Brennan Marion's 'Go-Go' offense scored 34.4 points per game in his first season. Marion is back, and his run-first, up-tempo attack could be even stronger. The quarterback position is seemingly the only question, with three players set to battle in the fall after Jayden Maiava's transfer to USC. Hajj-Malik Williams is a transfer from FCS Campbell, and he showed his dual-threat abilities in the spring. Cameron Friel was QB3 last season, and grad transfer Matthew Sluka was the Patriot League Player of the Year at FCS Holy Cross.

Jai'Den Thomas is the clear No. 1 back after running for 503 yards and 12 touchdowns, which led the nation's freshmen. Greg Burrell is a true freshman who turned heads in spring ball and will see his share of carries.

Wide receiver Ricky White III is an All-America candidate who set a school record with 1,483 receiving yards. Jacob De Jesus is the No. 2, and Texas transfer Casey Cain looks like No. 3 after an impressive spring.

Four starting offensive linemen also return, including first-team All-MWC right tackle Tiger Shanks. Jalen St. John is an NFL prospect at left guard.

DEFENSE The defense has seven returning starters, with three of them earning all-conference honors last season. Linebacker Jackson Woodard, a former Arkansas transfer, is the team's best defender. On the defensive line, end Jalen Dixon was a second-team All-MWC selection, and he will be bookended with Antonio Doyle Jr., a transfer from FCS Jackson State and Texas A&M who turned heads in spring ball.

In the secondary, cornerback Cameron Oliver (tied for the team lead with five INTs) is back, along with two Power 4 transfers — sixth-year strong safety Jalen Catalon, who played at Texas for one season and Arkansas for four, and cornerback Malik Chavis, a transfer from Arkansas.

SPECIALISTS Punter Marshall Nichols averaged 47.1 yards per punt last year and will be one of the best in the MWC. Andre Meono and Caden Chittenden are battling it out for placekicker duties. De Jesus posted a 16.1-yard average on punt returns and 25.7-yard average on kickoff returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Barry Odom's first season saw the Rebels earn their most league wins since joining the MWC in 1999. If they want to win the league this season, they will have to hit the jackpot at QB like they did with Maiava last season. All the other positions on offense are loaded, and the defense should be much improved.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Houston
Sept. 7	Utah Tech
Sept. 14	vs. Kansas #
Sept. 28	Fresno State
Oct. 5	Syracuse
Oct. 12	at Utah State
Oct. 19	at Oregon State
Oct. 26	Boise State
Nov. 9	at Hawaii
Nov. 16	San Diego State
Nov. 23	at San Jose St.
Nov. 30	Nevada

#Kansas City, KS

2023 RESULTS (9-5, 6-2 MWC)

Sept. 2	Bryant	W	44-14
Sept. 9	at Michigan	L	7-35
Sept. 16	Vanderbilt	W	40-37
Sept. 23	at UTEP	W	45-28
Sept. 30	Hawaii	W	44-20
Oct. 14	at Nevada	W	45-27
Oct. 21	Colorado State	W	25-23
Oct. 28	at Fresno State	L	24-31
Nov. 4	at New Mexico	W	56-14
Nov. 10	Wyoming	W	34-14
Nov. 18	at Air Force	W	31-27
Nov. 25	San José State	L	31-37
Dec. 2	Boise State #	L	20-44
Dec. 26	vs. Kansas %	L	36-49

#MW Championship %Guaranteed Rate Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Kayden McGee, WR	★★★
2.	Kahekili Pa'ao'ao, LB	★★★
3.	Damien McDaniel, CB	★★★
4.	Devin Green, RB	★★★
5.	Nijrell Eason II, CB	★★★
6.	Charles Correa, ATH	★★★
7.	Melvin Lester, LB	★★★
8.	Tre Fulton, S	★★★
9.	Gael Ochoa, QB	★★★
10.	Hank Puvis, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Barry Odom • Record at School: 9-5 (1 year) • Career Record: 34-30 (5 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Brennan Marion • Defensive Coordinator: Mike Scherer • Location: Las Vegas, Nev.
Stadium: Allegiant Stadium (65,000)

UTAH STATE AGGIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 92 | MWC PREDICTION: 7 | 2023 RECORD: 6-7, 4-4 MWC

OFFENSE In addition to his duties as head coach, Blake Anderson is the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach for the Aggies. Perhaps not coincidentally, the Aggies ranked No. 26 in the nation in scoring last season, and with eight starters back, it should again be a powerful unit.

Iowa transfer Spencer Petras won the quarterback job in spring over Utah transfer Bryson Barnes. Petras spent six years at Iowa, and Barnes was at Utah for four years. The Aggies will likely share carries at running back with Rahsul Faison and Robert Briggs Jr. Faison (736 rushing yards) was in the top 10 in the Mountain West in rushing yards per game, while Briggs netted 80 carries in 2023.

Wide receiver Jalen Royals set a school record with 15 touchdowns and had 1,080 yards, including six catches of more than 50 yards. He projects to be on several NFL Draft boards in 2025. Micah Davis (628 yards) is another returning starter, and tight ends Broc Lane and Josh Sterzer are both fifth-year seniors. The offensive line features plenty of experience.

DEFENSE Defensive end Cian Slone, who recorded 6.5 tackles for a loss last season, is the lone returning starter up front.

At linebacker, the Aggies lost Anthony Swifter and former Buffalo transfer and first-team All-MAC selection Shaun Dolac after spring practice. Cole Joyce and Jadon Pearson will battle in the fall to replace Swifter.

The secondary is led by safety Ike Larsen, a first-team All-MWC selection. Larsen had a team-high four interceptions, one of which he returned for a touchdown. Avante Dickerson, a former Oregon transfer, is back at one corner, and JD Drew will start at the other. New Mexico State transfer Jordan Vincent will be a new player to watch at safety.

SPECIALISTS Punter Stephen Kotsanlee was hurt after six games and replaced by Ryan Marks. Both are back, and Kotsanlee projects as the first-teamer. Kicker Elliott Nimrod was 11-for-14 last season on field goals with a long of 45. Davis was an honorable mention all-league punt returner last year and projects to add kick returns to his responsibilities as well.

FINAL ANALYSIS Utah State has been to three straight bowl games under Anderson and could have the best offense in the league again in 2024 if Petras can jell with the weapons around him. The question is whether the defense will improve from its No. 123 ranking in points allowed (34.7 per game). New defensive coordinator Nate Dreiling has arrived from New Mexico State, where his unit allowed just 22.8. If he can hit that number with the Aggies, Utah State will find itself in another bowl game.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Robert Morris
Sept. 7	at USC
Sept. 14	Utah
Sept. 21	at Temple
Oct. 5	at Boise State
Oct. 12	UNLV
Oct. 19	New Mexico
Oct. 26	at Wyoming
Nov. 9	at Washington St.
Nov. 16	Hawaii
Nov. 23	San Diego State
Nov. 30	at Colorado St.

2023 RESULTS (6-7, 4-4 MWC)

Sept. 2	at Iowa	L	14-24
Sept. 9	Idaho State	W	78-28
Sept. 15	at Air Force	L	21-39
Sept. 23	James Madison	L	38-45
Sept. 30	at Connecticut	W	34-33
Oct. 7	Colorado State	W	44-24
Oct. 13	Fresno State	L	32-37
Oct. 21	at San José State	L	21-42
Nov. 4	at San Diego St.(ot)	W	32-24
Nov. 11	Nevada	W	41-24
Nov. 18	Boise State	L	10-45
Nov. 24	at New Mexico (ot)	W	44-41
Dec. 23	vs. Georgia State#	L	22-45

#Famous Idaho Potato Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Marlin Dean, EDGE	★★★
2.	Nick Floyd, RB	★★★
3.	Tanner Williams, LB	★★★
4.	Herschel Turner, WR	★★★
5.	Camden Jury, OT	★★★
6.	Terrell Taylor, S	★★★
7.	Braydon Bailey, DL	★★★
8.	Jared Pele, OL	★★★
9.	Robert Freeman, WR	★★★
10.	Grayson Brousseau, TE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Blake Anderson • Record at School: 23-17 (3 years) • Career Record: 74-54 (10 years)
Offensive Coordinators: Blake Anderson, Kyle Cefalo • Defensive Coordinator: Nate Dreiling • Location: Logan, Utah
Stadium: Merlin Olsen Field at Maverik Stadium (25,513)

Jalen Royals

SCOUTING THE AGGIES

"I'm not sure there's another program hit by the portal culture quite like this one, where you have a successful group that showed they could win the conference, and then NIL pulls off 20 and 30 guys. They still haven't recovered. ... They're overhauling the defense this offseason and brought in a new staff and a new scheme, but we keep hearing and seeing their guys either testing the portal or jumping straight in. It's hard to know what they're going to look like because the roster is unstable at a lot of important places for them. "

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	1	**JALEN ROYALS (SR.)**	23	Grant Page (So.)
WR	26	Kyrese White (Sr.)	11	Kahanu Davis (Jr.)
WR	4	**MICAH DAVIS (SR.)**	9	Colby Bowman (Sr.)
LT	56	**COLE MOTES (SR.)**	57	Trey Andersen (Jr.)
LG	60	**WYATT BOWLES (SR)**	72	George Maile (So.)
C	69	**FALEPULE ALO (SR.)**	75	Bryce Radford (So.)
RG	65	**TAVO MOTU'APUAKA (SO.)**	62	**ALOALI'I MAUI (JR.)**
RT	54	Teague Andersen (So.)	70	Jr Sia (Fr.)
TE	83	Josh Sterzer (Sr.)	87	**BROC LANE (SR.)**
QB	7	Spencer Petras (Sr.)	16	Bryson Barnes (Jr.)
RB	3	Rahsul Faison (Sr.)	2	Robert Briggs Jr. (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	98	**CIAN SLONE (SR.)**	45	Enoka Migao (Jr.)
DT	91	Gabriel Iniguez Jr. (Jr.)	8	Macyo Williams (Sr.)
DT	95	Miguel Jackson (Sr.)	44	Bo Maile (Jr.)
DE	11	Blaine Spires (Sr.)	98	Cian Slone (Sr.)
ILB	20	Cole Joyce (Jr.)	39	Jadon Pearson (Sr.)
ILB	14	Bronson Olevao Jr. (So.)	20	Cole Joyce (Jr.)
CB	18	JD Drew (Jr.)	25	Noah Flores (Fr.)
CB	17	**AVANTE DICKERSON (JR.)**	22	Mason Edwards (Jr.)
NB	10	**JAIDEN FRANCOIS (SR.)**	4	Davon Graham II (Jr.)
BS	24	Jordan Vincent (Sr.)	2	Omari Okeke (Sr.)
FS	6	**IKE LARSEN (JR.)**	19	Chase Davis (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	89	Elliott Nimrod (Sr.)	KR	4	Micah Davis (Sr.)
P	63	Stephen Kotsanlee (Sr.)	PR	4	Micah Davis (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Wade Denniston

Jordan Bertagnole

Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE COWBOYS

"I wouldn't expect them to look much different from [former head coach Craig] Bohl at all. [Jay] Sawvel wants to keep the same culture and the same identity. The biggest thing we saw was they put names back on the jerseys. Bohl was a pretty old-school coach. ... The reason why they have to preserve that culture is that it's helped them build consistency with depth and development. They might add a little bit more pass to balance the offense, but they win by embracing physicality and running it right at you. It crushes the lighter defenses in this league. ... [Evan] Svoboda, the backup last year, will probably be their guy at quarterback. Defensively, they have some holes to fill to replace the starters from last year."

—An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	9	**ALEX BROWN (SR.)**	83	Will Pelissier (Sr.)
WR	2	Devin Boddie Jr. (Sr.)	23	Caleb Merritt (So.)
LT	72	**CADEN BARNETT (JR.)**	74	Forrest Scheel (So.)
LG	78	**WES KING (SO.)**	57	Luke Sandy (So.)
C	77	**NOFOAFIA TULAFONO (SR.)**	57	Luke Sandy (So.)
RG	79	**JACK WALSH (JR.)**	57	Luke Sandy (So.)
RT	71	Jake Davies (Fr.)	74	Forrest Scheel (So.)
TE	84	John M. Gyllenborg (Jr.)	86	Nick Miles (Sr.)
QB	17	Evan Svoboda (Jr.)	7	Jayden Clemons (Sr.)
RB	4	**HARRISON WAYLEE (SR.)**	22	Sam Scott (Jr.)
FB	36	Caleb Driskill (Sr.)	35	Kimball Madsen (Jr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	93	**DEVONNE HARRIS (SR.)**	34	Braden Siders (Jr.)
DT	96	**JORDAN BERTAGNOLE (SR.)**	94	Ben Florentine (Jr.)
NT	90	Gavin Meyer (Sr.)	95	Caleb Robinson (Sr.)
DE	54	**SEBASTIAN HARSH (JR.)**	40	Tyce Westland (Jr.)
LB	43	**SHAE SUIAUNOA (SR.)**	33	Connor Shay (Sr.)
LB	25	Cole De Marzo (Jr.)	22	Evan Eller (Sr.)
CB	12	Tyrecus Davis (Sr.)	4	Keany Parks (So.)
CB	13	Ian Bell (So.)	4	Keany Parks (So.)
NB	2	**WROOK BROWN (JR.)**	19	Malique Singleton (So.)
SS	42	**ISAAC WHITE (SR.)**	3	Andrew Johnson (Jr.)
FS	31	**WYETT EKELER (SR.)**	3	Andrew Johnson (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	46	John Hoyland (Sr.)	KR	2 Devin Boddie Jr. (Sr.)
P	99	Keelan Anderson (Fr.)	PR	19 Caleb Cooley (Sr.)

Returning starters in ***BOLD***

WYOMING COWBOYS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 89 | MWC PREDICTION: 6 | 2023 RECORD: 9-4, 5-3 MWC

OFFENSE Evan Svoboda will step in as the new quarterback wearing the No. 17 jersey Josh Allen made famous. Svoboda has the build of Allen, checking in at 6-foot-5, 245 pounds. He started vs. Texas last year and directed the game-winning drive in the Arizona Bowl win over Toledo.

With Svoboda, Wyoming will likely be closer to a 50/50 run/pass ratio than last season, when the Cowboys ran it 61 percent of the time. That said, all-league running back Harrison Waylee returns after running for 947 yards, and there is a deep group behind him in Sam Scott, North Carolina transfer DJ Jones and Dawaiian McNeely, who is returning from injury.

Svoboda's main pass-catchers will be Alex Brown and Will Pelissier, two players who will be expected to up their production in 2024. Tight end John Michael Gyllenborg could be among the Mountain West Conference's best now that he is no longer sharing the position.

The offensive line has four starters back, with one tackle spot still to likely be determined in the fall. Guard Jack Walsh and center Nofoafia Tulafono are all-league candidates.

DEFENSE A defense that was third in the Mountain West in total yardage welcomes back seven starters for new coordinator Aaron Bohl. The defensive line is deep and experienced and will be able to rotate players and stay fresh. Defensive tackle Jordan Bertagnole is the headliner with 60 tackles last season, earning him second-team All-MWC honors. Defensive end DeVonne Harris is a player to watch, and Sebastian Harsh had nine tackles for a loss from the other defensive end spot.

Shae Suiaunoa is moving from weakside linebacker to middle linebacker and is the team's leading returning tackler. The returning safety tandem of Wyett Ekeler (younger brother of Washington Commanders running back Austin Ekeler) and Isaac White is one of the best in the league.

SPECIALISTS Kicker John Hoyland is back for his fifth season. Two years ago, he was a Lou Groza finalist after nailing 22-of-25 attempts, including four 50-yarders, but last season he dipped a bit, connecting on 13-of-20. The punting position was still in flux in the spring, with Keelan Anderson and Erik Sandvik taking reps.

FINAL ANALYSIS Craig Bohl left the program in good shape when he announced his retirement after 10 years at the helm. Not counting the pandemic season, Wyoming has made a bowl in six of its last seven years, and there are plenty of veterans to keep things on track. The wide receivers will need to step up, and Svoboda has to fulfill expectations for Wyoming to be in the mix near the top of the league.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Arizona State
Sept. 7	Idaho
Sept. 14	BYU
Sept. 21	at North Texas
Sept. 28	Air Force
Oct. 12	San Diego State
Oct. 19	at San José St.
Oct. 26	Utah State
Nov. 2	at New Mexico
Nov. 16	at Colorado St.
Nov. 23	Boise State
Nov. 30	at Washington St.

2023 RESULTS (9-4, 5-3 MWC)

Sept. 2	Texas Tech (ot)	W	35-33
Sept. 9	Portland State	W	31-17
Sept. 16	at Texas	L	10-31
Sept. 23	Appalachian State	W	22-19
Sept. 30	New Mexico	W	35-26
Oct. 7	Fresno State	W	24-19
Oct. 14	at Air Force	L	27-34
Oct. 28	at Boise State	L	7-32
Nov. 3	Colorado State	W	24-15
Nov. 10	at UNLV	L	14-34
Nov. 18	Hawaii	W	42-9
Nov. 25	at Nevada	W	42-6
Dec. 30	vs. Toledo #	W	16-15

#Arizona Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Daegon Bryant, S	★★★
2.	Dash Bauman, LB	★★★
3.	Eltoum Murgus, EDGE	★★★
4.	Chris Durr, WR	★★★
5.	Jake Wilson, TE	★★★
6.	Hunter Kallstrom, TE	★★★
7.	Gary Rutherford, LB	★★★
8.	Adrian Onyiego, LB	★★★
9.	Giovanni Panozzo, OT	★★★
10.	Tyrese Boss, ATH	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jay Sawvel • Record at School: First season • Career Record: First season
Offensive Coordinator: Jay Johnson • Defensive Coordinator: Aaron Bohl • Location: Laramie, Wyo.
Stadium: War Memorial Stadium (29,181)

OREGON STATE BEAVERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 81 | 2023 RECORD: 8-5, 5-4 PAC-12

OFFENSE Oregon State made its offensive bones the past six years under former head coach Jonathan Smith with a pro-style attack. That changes under first-year head coach Trent Bray, as he's looking for more explosive plays and a playmaking upgrade from the running backs.

Offensive coordinator Ryan Gunderson, formerly of UCLA, likes to take advantage of his quarterback's mobility. FCS Idaho transfer Gevani McCoy has a leg up because of experience but must prove he can make the step up in competition. Redshirt freshman Gabarri Johnson, a transfer from Missouri and former 4-star recruit, is likely to press McCoy.

Despite the transfer of two-time All-Pac 12 running back Damien Martinez, the Beavers have strength in the backfield. Jam Griffin, who rushed for 488 yards in 2022, and Colorado transfer Anthony Hankerson give the Beavers a receiving threat they haven't had from running backs in years.

OSU's offensive line, touted as among the country's best the past two years, is in transition. The Beavers have anchors in seniors Joshua Gray and Grant Starck, who have a combined 61 career starts.

Oregon State has much to prove at receiver, but speedy Zachary Card and Michigan transfer Darrius Clemons could be threats.

DEFENSE The Beavers should make things difficult on opposing quarterbacks with the pass-rushing abilities of senior Nikko Taylor and junior Oluwaseyi Omotosho. OSU believes in its run-stuffing defensive front that includes transfers Jacob Schuster (Minnesota) and Tygee Hill (LSU).

At inside linebacker, the Beavers are high on the potential of sophomore Melvin Jordan IV, redshirt freshman Isaiah Chisom and junior college transfer Aiden Sullivan. Jordan and Chisom made their starting debuts in the 2023 Sun Bowl and combined for 15 tackles, five for a loss.

The secondary has experience in corners Jaden Robinson and Kobe Singleton, a Liberty transfer who earned first team All-Conference USA honors. Replacing all-conference safeties Kitan Oladapo and Akili Arnold won't be easy, but Oregon State likes the potential of junior Skyler Thomas.

SPECIALISTS OSU loses kicker Atticus Sappington to Oregon, but senior Everett Hayes, a former starter, is fully healed from a groin injury. Senior punter Josh Green returns after averaging 42 yards per kick in 2023.

FINAL ANALYSIS Oregon State will lean on its defense in most games, but the season's win total hinges on the productivity of an unproven offense. If the offense can limit mistakes and produce explosive plays, eight wins are possible. If not, OSU will struggle to earn a bowl berth.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Idaho State
Sept. 7	at San Diego St.
Sept. 14	Oregon
Sept. 21	Purdue
Oct. 5	Colorado State
Oct. 12	at Nevada
Oct. 19	UNLV
Oct. 26	at California
Nov. 9	San José State
Nov. 16	at Air Force
Nov. 23	Washington St.
Nov. 30	at Boise State

2023 RESULTS (8-5, 5-4 PAC-12)

Sept. 3	at San José State	W	42-17
Sept. 9	UC Davis	W	55-7
Sept. 16	San Diego State	W	26-9
Sept. 23	at Washington St.	L	35-38
Sept. 29	Utah	W	21-7
Oct. 7	at California	W	52-40
Oct. 14	UCLA	W	36-24
Oct. 28	at Arizona	L	24-27
Nov. 4	at Colorado	W	26-19
Nov. 11	Stanford	W	62-17
Nov. 18	Washington	L	20-22
Nov. 24	at Oregon	L	7-31
Dec. 29	vs. Notre Dame #	L	8-40

#Sun Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Exodus Ayers, CB	★★★★
2.	Jaheim Patterson, S	★★★
3.	Jordan Anderson, WR	★★★
4.	Gyriece Goodman, LB	★★★
5.	Amarion York, CB	★★★
6.	Malachi Durant, WR	★★★
7.	Eddie Freauff, WR	★★★
8.	Aiden Sullivan, LB	★★★
9.	Shamar Meikle, EDGE	★★★
10.	Dylan Sikorski, OL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Trent Bray • Record at School: First season • Career Record: First season
Offensive Coordinator: Ryan Gunderson • Defensive Coordinator: Keith Hayward • Location: Corvallis, Ore.
Stadium: Reser Stadium (35,548)

Jaden Robinson

SCOUTING THE BEAVERS

"The reality is that there's no recovering after what's been done to this program. It sucks to say that because OSU brought a lot to the old Pac-12 and belongs at this level. ... You can't blame [Jonathan] Smith for going to the Big Ten, but the timing is brutal. ... They'll look better on defense because that's [head coach Trent] Bray's unit, and there's less questions there. They ran through a lot of QBs in spring to find one for the new system. The spread is a good plan on paper, but it's really different from Smith's old system. They're gonna lean on tempo and space to get those new guys acclimated, kind of like the classic Wazzu system."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	28	Trent Walker (Jr.)	3	Jamai East (So.)
WR	12	Zachary Card (Fr.)	18	Jeremiah Noga (Jr.)
WR	21	David Wells Jr. (Fr.)	1	Darrius Clemons (Fr.)
LT	69	Jacob Strand (So.)		Gerad Christian-Lichtenhan (Sr.)
LG	67	**JOSHUA GRAY (SR.)**	77	Flavio Gonzalez (Sr.)
C	58	Van Wells (Jr.)	70	Zander Esty (Fr.)
RG	63	Luka Vincic (So.)	79	Tyler Voltin (Jr.)
RT	66	Grant Starck (Sr.)	78	Nathan Elu (So.)
TE	84	**JERMAINE TERRY II (SR.)**	82	Gabe Milbourn (Jr.)
QB	7	Gevani McCoy (Jr.)	5	Gabarri Johnson (Fr.)
RB	0	Anthony Hankerson (Jr.)	8	Jam Griffin (Sr.)

DEFENSE (1)

DL	95	Tygee Hill (So.)	62	Jacob Schuster (Jr.)
DL	45	Semisi Saluni (Sr.)	97	Nick Norris (Sr.)
OLB	25	Nikko Taylor (Sr.)	13	DJ Wesolak (So.)
OLB	33	Oluwaseyi Omotosho (Jr.)	56	Zakaih Saez (Fr.)
ILB	9	Isaiah Chisom (Fr.)	2	Aiden Sullivan (Jr.)
ILB	44	Melvin Jordan IV (So.)	20	John Miller (Jr.)
CB	0	Kobe Singleton (Sr.)	27	Andre Jordan Jr. (Fr.)
CB	4	**JADEN ROBINSON (SR.)**	1	Mason White (Jr.)
NB	21	Noble Thomas Jr. (So.)	8	Sai Vadrawale III (Fr.)
FS	17	Skyler Thomas (Jr.)	5	Amarion York (Jr.)
SS	24	Jack Kane (Jr.)	6	Jaheim Patterson (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	35	Everett Hayes (Sr.)	KR 12	Zachary Card (Fr.)
P	37	Josh Green (Sr.)	PR 4	Jaden Robinson (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Soobum Im-USA TODAY Sports

Kyle Williams

Joe Nicholson-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE COUGARS

"If they can protect the roster from a lot of late portal attrition, they've got a pretty solid core returning for the transition year out of the Pac-12. ... It really depends on how you look at the program. They're a very, very talented and effective Mountain West roster, but they're not as strong if you're grading on the P4 level. ... [Quarterback John] Mateer was their backup for a while, and he's certainly not [Cameron] Ward, but he knows the system and verbiage and will probably be their starter. ... With all the uncertainty around their future, [head coach Jake] Dickert has done an absolutely amazing job keeping their culture intact with the influx of new players."

— An opposing Mountain West assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

		OFFENSE (6)		
WR	2	**KYLE WILLIAMS (SR.)**	1	Kris Hutson (Sr.)
WR	8	Carlos Hernandez (So.)	3	Tre Shackelford (Jr.)
WR	18	Josh Meredith (Jr.)	0	Tony Freeman (So.)
LT	76	**ESA POLE (SR.)**	57	Rodrick Tialavea (Jr.)
LG	61	**CHRISTIAN HILBORN (JR.)**	71	Ashton Tripp (Fr.)
C	70	Devin Kylany (Jr.)	74	Zack Miller (So.)
RG	65	**BROCK DIEU (JR.)**	75	Noah Dunham (Fr.)
RT	79	**FA'ALILI FA'AMOE (JR.)**	67	Jonny Lester (So.)
TE	24	**COOPER MATHERS (SR.)**	42	Billy Riviere III (Sr.)
QB	10	John Mateer (Jr.)	4	Zevi Eckhaus (Sr.)
RB	15	Djouvensky Schlenbaker (So.)	20	Leo Pulalasi (So.)

		DEFENSE (3)		
DE	15	Nusi Malani (Sr.)	20	Quinn Roff (Sr.)
DT	60	**DAVID GUSTA (JR.)**	44	Khalil Laufau (So.)
DT	92	Ansel Din-Mbuh (So.)	19	Rashad Mackenzie (So.)
DE	3	Syrus Webster (Sr.)	45	Raam Stevenson (Jr.)
LB	52	**KYLE THORNTON (SR.)**	46	Parker McKenna (Jr.)
LB	18	Buddah Al-Uqdah (So.)	27	Hudson Cedarland (So.)
LB	21	Keith Brown (Jr.)	43	Tai Fa'avae (Fr.)
CB	6	Adrian Wilson (So.)	29	Jamorri Colson (Jr.)
CB	4	Kapena Gushiken (Sr.)	22	Warren Smith Jr. (So.)
SS	2	**JACKSON LATAIMUA (JR.)**	32	Tanner Moku (Sr.)
FS	5	Tyson Durant (Sr.)	28	Reece Sylvester (So.)

		SPECIALISTS		
K	49	Dean Janikowski (Sr.)	KR	0 Tony Freeman (So.)
P	38	Nick Haberer (Sr.)	PR	1 Kris Hutson (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

WASHINGTON STATE COUGARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 82 | 2023 RECORD: 5-7, 2-7 PAC-12

OFFENSE Washington State's offensive concepts may look familiar, but its personnel will not. As the Cougars head into the 2024 season, which they will play against mostly Mountain West teams as they recover from the Pac-12's implosion last summer, they're working on bringing a host of new players into the fray.

In the wake of former quarterback Cameron Ward's decision over the offseason to transfer to Miami (Fla.), WSU's starting QB battle will feature John Mateer, who worked as the Cougs' backup each of the past two seasons, against Zevi Eckhaus, a transfer from FCS Bryant. Mateer may have the advantage of experience at WSU, but he hasn't seen the field much.

Eckhaus, last season's Big South-OVC Offensive Player of the Year, was a finalist for the 2023 Walter Payton Award, which goes to the top FCS player in the country. Eckhaus matched the school record for single-season touchdown passes last season with 28.

Elsewhere on offense, WSU will have to whittle down its rotation of wide receivers, which includes top returner Kyle Williams and a host of transfers: Tre Shackelford (FCS Austin Peay), Kyle Maxwell (Louisiana Tech), Kris Hutson (Oregon) and Tony Freeman (College of San Mateo).

Central to the Cougs' offense will be the development of the line, which permitted 38 sacks, fourth most in the Pac-12. It also allowed 91 pressures according to PFF, second most in the conference.

DEFENSE The Cougars' defense will be looking to replace a few players from a unit that finished sixth last year in the Pac-12 in total defense, allowing an average of 389 yards per game. Star edge rushers Brennan Jackson and Ron Stone Jr. have moved on, signaling a need at that position.

WSU's secondary needs a makeover. Star safety Jaden Hicks went to the NFL Draft, as did cornerback Chau Smith-Wade, both of whom were staples at their positions the past couple of years. Expect nickelback Kapena Gushiken (36 tackles, five pass breakups, one interception last year) and safety Tyson Durant (Akron transfer) to fill some of those gaps.

SPECIALISTS Senior kicker Dean Janikowski is back for his sixth and final season at WSU. Last fall, he made 10-of-15 field goals, including a 2-for-4 mark from 50-plus yards. Senior punter Nick Haberer will also return, which bodes well for the Cougs' special teams unit.

FINAL ANALYSIS WSU is playing eight games against Mountain West opponents (six courtesy of a scheduling agreement in the wake of the Pac-12's collapse) this season. Even against an easier slate, the Cougars will be tested as new players step up. If their offensive line can improve in the run game and a strong candidate emerges at QB, they can make some noise.

2024 SCHEDULE	
Aug. 31	Portland State
Sept. 7	Texas Tech
Sept. 14	at Washington #
Sept. 21	San José State
Sept. 28	at Boise State
Oct. 12	at Fresno State
Oct. 19	Hawaii
Oct. 26	at San Diego St.
Nov. 9	Utah State
Nov. 16	at New Mexico
Nov. 23	at Oregon State
Nov. 30	Wyoming

#Lumen Field

2023 RESULTS (5-7, 2-7 PAC-12)			
Sept. 2	at Colorado State	W	50-24
Sept. 9	Wisconsin	W	31-22
Sept. 16	Northern Colorado	W	59-7
Sept. 23	Oregon State	W	38-35
Oct. 7	at UCLA	L	17-25
Oct. 14	Arizona	L	6-44
Oct. 21	at Oregon	L	24-38
Oct. 28	at Arizona State	L	27-38
Nov. 4	Stanford	L	7-10
Nov. 11	at California	L	39-42
Nov. 17	Colorado	W	56-14
Nov. 25	at Washington	L	21-24

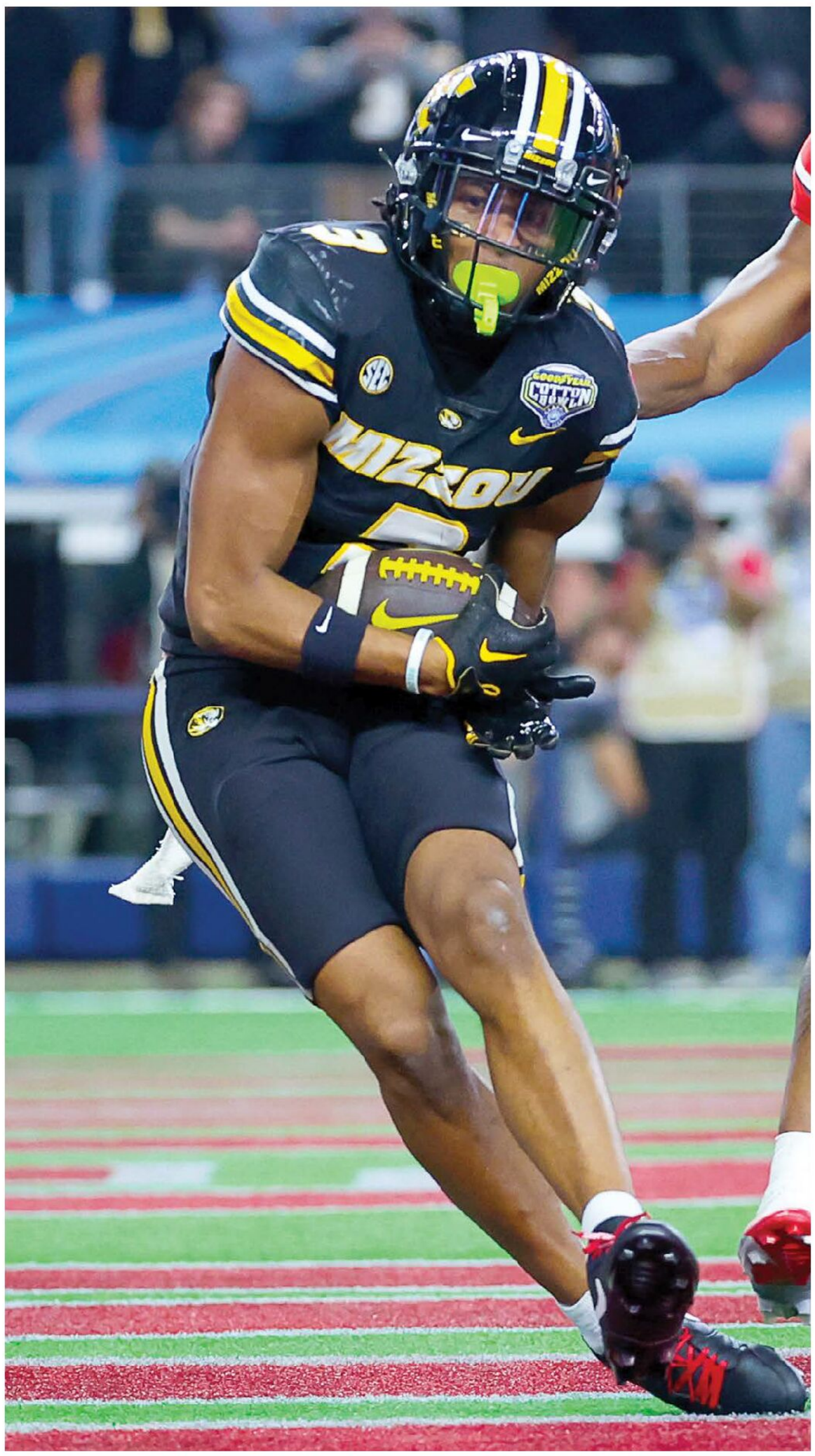
TOP 10 RECRUITS*	
1. Kayo Patu, S	★★★
2. Carson Osmus, OT	★★★
3. Tony Freeman, WR	★★★
4. Josh Joyner, RB	★★★
5. Wayshawn Parker, RB	★★★
6. Tyson Weaver, CB	★★★
7. Malachi Wrice, EDGE	★★★
8. Camden Degraw, EDGE	★★★
9. Jackson Cowgill, DL	★★★
10. Kenny Worthy, ATH	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jake Dickert • Record at School: 15-16 (3 years) • Career Record: 15-16 (3 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Ben Arbuckle • Defensive Coordinator: Jeff Schmedding • Location: Pullman, Wash.
Stadium: Martin Stadium (32,952)

PREVIEW



Luther Burden III, WR, Missouri

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

1	GEORGIA	BULLDOGS
2	TEXAS	LONGHORNS
3	OLE MISS	REBELS
4	ALABAMA	CRIMSON TIDE
5	MISSOURI	TIGERS
6	LSU	TIGERS
7	TENNESSEE	VOLUNTEERS
8	OKLAHOMA	SOONERS
9	TEXAS A&M	AGGIES
10	AUBURN	TIGERS
11	FLORIDA	GATORS
12	KENTUCKY	WILDCATS
13	SOUTH CAROLINA	GAMECOCKS
14	ARKANSAS	RAZORBACKS
15	MISSISSIPPI STATE	BULLDOGS
16	VANDERBILT	COMMODORES

SEC CHAMPIONSHIP

GEORGIA OVER TEXAS

Kevin Jairaj-USA TODAY Sports

ALL SEC-TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	Carson Beck	Georgia
RB	Trevor Etienne	Georgia
RB	Jarquez Hunter	Auburn
AP	Luther Burden III	Missouri
WR	Tre Harris	Ole Miss
WR	Juice Wells	Ole Miss
WR	Isaiah Bond	Texas
TE	Caden Prieskorn	Ole Miss
OL	Emery Jones	LSU
OL	Will Campbell	LSU
OL	Kelvin Banks Jr.	Texas
OL	Tate Ratledge	Georgia
OL	Tyler Booker	Alabama

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	James Pearce Jr.	Tennessee
DL	Landon Jackson	Arkansas
DL	Deone Walker	Kentucky
DL	Nic Scourton	Texas A&M
DL	Walter Nolen	Ole Miss
LB	Mykel Williams	Georgia
LB	Harold Perkins Jr.	LSU
LB	Danny Stutsman	Oklahoma
DB	Maxwell Hairston	Kentucky
DB	Malachi Moore	Alabama
DB	Malaki Starks	Georgia
DB	Billy Bowman Jr.	Oklahoma

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	Bert Auburn	Texas
P	James Burnip	Alabama
KR	Barion Brown	Kentucky
PR	Keionte Scott	Auburn

For second- and third-team selections, visit athlonsports.com

Mykel Williams, LB, Georgia

Jayne Kamin-Oncea-USA TODAY Sports

BOWL PROJECTIONS

Birmingham: South Carolina vs. Tulane

Citrus: Missouri vs. Iowa

Gasparilla: Florida vs. SMU

Gator: LSU vs. Miami (Fla.)

Las Vegas: Texas A&M vs. Arizona

Liberty: Auburn vs. West Virginia

Music City: Kentucky vs. Wisconsin

Reliaquest: Tennessee vs. Nebraska

Texas: Oklahoma vs. Kansas

CFP First Round: Texas vs. Notre Dame

CFP First Round: Ole Miss vs. Penn State

CFP First Round: Alabama vs. Michigan

Peach Bowl (CFP Quarterfinals): Texas vs. Florida St.

Rose Bowl (CFP Quarterfinals): Ole Miss vs. Ohio St.

Sugar Bowl (CFP Quarterfinals): Georgia vs. Alabama

Orange Bowl (CFP Semifinals): Georgia vs. Oregon

Cotton Bowl (CFP Semifinals): Texas vs. Ohio State

National Championship: Georgia vs. Ohio State

SEC PREVIEW

Kalen DeBoer, Alabama

DJ Lagway, Florida

COACHING CAROUSEL

ALABAMA
Head Coach: New: Kalen DeBoer; Old: Nick Saban
Offense: New: JaMarcus Shephard, Nick Sheridan; Old: Tommy Rees
Defense: New: Maurice Linguist, Kane Wommack; Old: Kevin Steele

ARKANSAS
Offense: New: Bobby Petrino
Old: Kenny Guiton (interim)

AUBURN
Offense: New: Derrick Nix
Old: Philip Montgomery
Defense: New: DJ Durkin, Charles Kelly
Old: Ron Roberts

FLORIDA
Offense: New: Russ Callaway, Rob Sale; Old: Rob Sale
Defense: New: Austin Armstrong, Ron Roberts; Old: Austin Armstrong, Sean Spencer

GEORGIA
Defense: New: Travaris Robinson, Glenn Schumann; Old: Will Muschamp, Glenn Schumann

KENTUCKY
Offense: New: Bush Hamdan
Old: Liam Coen
Defense: New: Chris Collins, Brad White; Old: Brad White

LSU
Offense: New: Cortez Hankton, Joe Sloan; Old: Mike Denbrock
Defense: New: Blake Baker; Old: Matt House

MISSISSIPPI STATE
Head Coach: New: Jeff Lebby; Old: Zach Arnett
Offense: New: Jeff Lebby; Old: Kevin Barbay
Defense: New: Matt Barnes, Coleman Hutzler; Old: Matt Brock

MISSOURI
Defense: New: Corey Batoon, D.J. Smith; Old: Blake Baker

OKLAHOMA
Offense: New: Joe Jon Finley, Seth Littrell; Old: Jeff Lebby
Defense: New: Zac Alley, Todd Bates; Old: Ted Roof

OLE MISS
Offense: New: Charlie Weis Jr.
Old: John David Baker, Charlie Weis Jr.
Defense: New: Bryan Brown, Pete Golding; Old: Pete Golding

TEXAS
Defense: New: Pete Kwiatkowski, Johnny Nansen: Old: Jeff Choate, Pete Kwiatkowski

TEXAS A&M
Head Coach: New: Mike Elko; Old: Jimbo Fisher
Offense: New: Collin Klein, Holmon Wiggins; Old: Bobby Petrino, James Coley
Defense: New: Jay Bateman, Jordan Peterson; Old: DJ Durkin

VANDERBILT
Offense: New: Tim Beck; Old: Joey Lynch
Defense: New: Clark Lea; Old: Nick Howell

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	DJ Lagway	QB	Florida	★★★★★+	2
2.	Cam Coleman	WR	Auburn	★★★★★+	3
3.	Ellis Robinson IV	CB	Georgia	★★★★★+	4
4.	LJ McCray	DL	Florida	★★★★★	6
5.	Jordan Ross	Edge	Tennessee	★★★★★	7
6.	Ryan Williams	WR	Alabama	★★★★★+	8
7.	Justin Williams	LB	Georgia	★★★★★+	9
8.	Dylan Stewart	Edge	South Carolina	★★★★★+	12
9.	Williams Nwaneri	Edge	Missouri	★★★★★+	14
10.	Terry Bussey	ATH	Texas A&M	★★★★★+	15

+Consensus 5-star prospect

From top: Gary Cosby Jr.-Tuscaloosa News; Matt Pendleton/Gainesville Sun

Quinn Ewers, QB, Texas

Billy Bowman Jr., DB, Oklahoma

SEC RETURNING LEADERS

PASSING	ATT	COMP	PCT	YDS	TD	INT	AVG/G
Quinn Ewers, Texas	394	272	69.0	3,479	30	6	289.9
Carson Beck, Georgia	417	302	72.4	3,941	24	6	281.5
Jaxson Dart, Ole Miss	358	233	65.1	3,364	23	5	258.8

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Marcus Carroll*, Georgia St.	274	1,350	4.9	13	63	112.5
Jarquez Hunter, Auburn	159	909	5.7	7	67	75.8
Trevor Etienne*, Florida	131	753	5.8	8	62	68.5

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Luther Burden III, Missouri	86	1,212	14.1	9	56	93.2
Tre Harris, Ole Miss	54	985	18.2	8	56	89.5
Kelly Akharaiyi*, UTEP	48	1,033	21.5	7	80	86.1

DEFENSE

TACKLES
Debo Williams, South Carolina (113); Danny Stutsman, Oklahoma (104)

SACKS
Trey Moore*, UTSA (14.0); James Pearce Jr., Tennessee (10.0)

INTERCEPTIONS
Billy Bowman Jr., Oklahoma (6); Maxwell Hairston, Kentucky (5)

**Carroll transferred to Missouri in the offseason; *Etienne transferred to Georgia in the offseason*
**Akharaiyi transferred to Mississippi State in the offseason; *Moore transferred to Texas in the offseason*

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Georgia (1)
2. Alabama (2)
3. Texas (6)
4. LSU (7)
5. Auburn (8)
6. Oklahoma (9)
7. Florida (10)
8. Tennessee (13)
9. Texas A&M (17)
10. Ole Miss (19)
11. South Carolina (20)
12. Missouri (21)
13. Kentucky (25)
14. Mississippi State (26)
15. Arkansas (28)
16. Vanderbilt (39)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

GAMES TO WATCH

SEPT. 7
Texas at Michigan

SEPT. 21
Tennessee at Oklahoma

SEPT. 28
Georgia at Alabama

OCT. 12
Texas vs. Oklahoma (Dallas)

OCT. 12
Ole Miss at LSU

OCT. 19
Georgia at Texas

OCT. 19
Alabama at Tennessee

OCT. 26
Missouri at Alabama

NOV. 9
Georgia at Ole Miss

NOV. 9
Alabama at LSU

NOV. 30
Texas at Texas A&M

NOV. 30
Auburn at Alabama

From top: Aaron E. Martinez/American-Statesman; Daniel Dunn-USA TODAY Sports

ALABAMA CRIMSON TIDE

NATIONAL FORECAST: 6 | SEC PREDICTION: 4 | 2023 RECORD: 12-2, 8-0 SEC

OFFENSE New head coach Kalen DeBoer will bring an offensive system to Alabama that was among college football's most productive at Washington the past two seasons. DeBoer lost his longtime offensive coordinator Ryan Grubb to the NFL but replaced him with Nick Sheridan, who coached tight ends at Washington and previously led Indiana's offense. Sheridan will call plays and try to adjust the scheme that made Michael Penix Jr. so successful last season so that it best fits the strengths of Tide incumbent Jalen Milroe. That could mean more deep shots and designed runs, taking advantage of Milroe's athleticism and home-run ability.

Promising five-star sophomore Justice Haynes should anchor the backfield, but there are questions at wide receiver and along the offensive line. Five-star freshman receiver Ryan Williams could play a big early role along with Washington transfer pass-catcher Germie Bernard.

DEFENSE Nick Saban's defense was among the best in college football for the past 17 seasons. Now, Alabama must turn the page to a new defensive coordinator in Kane Wommack, who stepped down as South Alabama's head coach to rejoin DeBoer after they had previously worked together at Indiana. Wommack brings his 4-2-5 "Swarm" defense to the Tide, but he has emphasized that his system has evolved into something closer to Saban's system. While Saban was known for his base 3-4 alignment, his defense in recent seasons has resembled a 4-2-5. Wommack has met with Saban to discuss where returning players best fit.

Alabama brings back some important pieces in defensive lineman Tim Keenan III, linebackers Deontae Lawson and Jihaad Campbell and safety Malachi Moore. But the Tide must replace the two star pass rushers and two star cornerbacks that they lost to the NFL.

SPECIALISTS For the first time since 2018, Alabama will begin a season with a kicker other than Will Reichard. His replacement: Graham Nicholson, a transfer from Miami (Ohio) who went 27-of-28 on field goals in 2023. Alabama will have two stalwarts back at punter in James Burnip and long snapper Kneeland Hibbett, both returning for a fourth season.

FINAL ANALYSIS Alabama's historic success under Saban meant that the expectations each season were essentially national championship or bust. The bar is still high, but expectations need to be kept in check for DeBoer's first season, as he brings together a new coaching staff and a turned-over roster that had almost 40 players leave through the transfer portal or for the NFL Draft. Alabama plays a tough schedule but still has enough talent to compete for a spot in the new 12-team College Football Playoff.

2023 RESULTS (12-2, 8-0 SEC)

Sept. 2	Middle Tennessee	W	56-7
Sept. 9	Texas	L	24-34
Sept. 16	at South Florida	W	17-3
Sept. 23	Ole Miss	W	24-10
Sept. 30	at Mississippi St.	W	40-17
Oct. 7	at Texas A&M	W	26-20
Oct. 14	Arkansas	W	24-21
Oct. 21	Tennessee	W	34-20
Nov. 4	LSU	W	42-28
Nov. 11	at Kentucky	W	49-21
Nov. 18	Chattanooga	W	66-10
Nov. 25	at Auburn	W	27-24
Dec. 2	vs. Georgia #	W	27-24
Jan. 1	vs. Michigan % (ot)	L	20-27

#Atlanta %Rose Bowl: CFB Playoff Semifinal

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	WKU
Sept. 7	South Florida
Sept. 14	at Wisconsin
Sept. 28	Georgia
Oct. 5	at Vanderbilt
Oct. 12	South Carolina
Oct. 19	at Tennessee
Oct. 26	Missouri
Nov. 9	at LSU
Nov. 16	Mercer
Nov. 23	at Oklahoma
Nov. 30	Auburn

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Ryan Williams, WR ★★★★★
2. Zavier Mincey, CB ★★★★★
3. Caleb Odom, TE ★★★★★
4. Jaylen Mbakwe, CB ★★★★★
5. Zabien Brown, CB ★★★★
6. Casey Poe, OL ★★★★
7. Noah Carter, EDGE ★★★★
8. Kevin Riley, RB ★★★★
9. Jeremiah Beaman, DL ★★★★
10. William Sanders, OL ★★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kalen DeBoer • Record at School: First season Career Record: 104-12 (9 years) • Offensive Coordinators: Nick Sheridan, JaMarcus Shephard • Defensive Coordinators: Kane Wommack, Colin Hitschler, Maurice Linguist • Location: Tuscaloosa, Ala. • Stadium: Bryant-Denny Stadium (100,077)

Jalen Milroe

SCOUTING THE CRIMSON TIDE

"There's so much change that it's hard to know how to scout them right now. The biggest win is keeping [quarterback Jalen] Milroe around; that was a no-brainer for him after watching what that staff was able to get out of [Michael] Penix [Jr.]. ... The biggest talk right now is about the end of the 'Alabama Discount' where guys wouldn't jump in the portal or wouldn't push for NIL because the Nick Saban track record for NFL development was so good. That's not around anymore, so they've got to get organized. ... This is still a very talented, conference-title-caliber roster. There are some big questions, like O-line, but they're not just going to fall off the face of the earth. The question is, if they have a bump, how patient is the fan base?"

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	5	Germie Bernard (Jr.)		Ryan Williams (Fr.)
WR	19	Kendrick Law (Jr.)	24	Emmanuel Henderson Jr. (Jr.)
WR	6	Kobe Prentice (Jr.)	13	Cole Adams (Fr.)
LT	74	**KADYN PROCTOR (SO.)**	65	Naquil Betrand (Fr.)
LG	52	**TYLER BOOKER (JR.)**	73	Olaus Alinen (Fr.)
C	72	Parker Brailsford (So.)	69	Joseph Ionata (Fr.)
RG	77	**JAEDEN ROBERTS (JR.)**	55	Roq Montgomery (Fr.)
RT	57	Elijah Pritchett (So.)	75	Wilkin Formby (Fr.)
TE	81	**CJ DIPPRE (SR.)**	45	**ROBBIE OUZTS (SR.)**
QB	4	**JALEN MILROE (JR.)**	15	Ty Simpson (So.)
RB	22	Justice Haynes (So.)	26	Jam Miller (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	20	Jah-Marien Latham (Sr.)	22	LT Overton (Jr.)
DT	96	**TIM KEENAN III (JR.)**	10	Jehiem Oatis (Jr.)
DT	50	**TIM SMITH (SR.)**	44	Damon Payne Jr. (Jr.)
OLB	19	Keanu Koht (Jr.)	34	Quandarrius Robinson (Sr.)
ILB	0	**DEONTAE LAWSON (JR.)**	28	Justin Jefferson (Sr.)
ILB	11	**JIHAAD CAMPBELL (JR.)**	35	Jeremiah Alexander (So.)
HUSKY	8	DeVonta Smith (Jr.)	16	Red Morgan (Fr.)
CB	1	Domani Jackson (Jr.)	12	Zavier Mincey (Fr.)
CB	9	Jaylen Mbakwe (Fr.)	15	Zabien Brown (Fr.)
S	13	**MALACHI MOORE (SR.)**	18	Bray Hubbard (So.)
S	3	Keon Sabb (Jr.)		Kameron Howard (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K		Graham Nicholson (Sr.)	KR	5 Germie Bernard (Jr.)
P	86	James Burnip (Sr.)	PR	5 Germie Bernard (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Gary A. Vasquez-USA TODAY Sports

Landon Jackson

Petre Thomas-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE RAZORBACKS

"This is the hot-seat job for the SEC heading into the season. Sam [Pittman] is such a well-respected guy across this industry, you really feel for him having a guy like [new offensive coordinator Bobby] Petrino, who the fans and boosters probably think should be head coach, coming in underneath him. That's the SEC right there. ... If Petrino can get [quarterback] Taylen Green ready, they might have a shot at a .500 year, but they have a shaky situation with their offensive line losses in the spring. Is .500 enough to keep Sam? The defensive line is their best unit probably, but they just don't have the overall defensive talent right now to compete in this league."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	2	**ANDREW ARMSTRONG (SR.)**	4	**ISAAC TESLAA (SR.)**
WR	5	Tyrone Broden (Sr.)	1	Jaedon Wilson (Jr.)
WR	16	Isaiah Sategna (So.)	17	CJ Brown (Fr.)
LT	55	Fernando Carmona (Jr.)	76	E'Marion Harris (So.)
LG	75	**PATRICK KUTAS (JR.)**	67	Josh Street (Jr.)
C	63	Addison Nichols (So.)	56	Amaury Wiggins (Jr.)
RG	72	**JOSHUA BRAUN (SR.)**	50	Kobe Branham (Fr.)
RT	54	Keyshawn Blackstock (Jr.)	53	Ty'Kieast Crawford (Sr.)
TE	9	**LUKE HASZ (SO.)**	8	Ty Washington (So.)
QB	10	Taylen Green (Jr.)	3	Malachi Singleton (Fr.)
RB	7	Rashod Dubinion (Jr.)	22	Ja'Quinden Jackson (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	40	**LANDON JACKSON (SR.)**	97	Quincy Rhodes Jr. (So.)
DT	50	**ERIC GREGORY (SR.)**	93	Keivie Rose (Sr.)
DT	5	Cameron Ball (Jr.)	95	Ian Geffrard (Fr.)
DE	0	Nico Davillier (Jr.)	4	Anton Juncaj (Sr.)
LB	10	Xavian Sorey Jr. (Jr.)	23	Carson Dean (Fr.)
LB	22	Brad Spence (So.)	20	Alex Sanford (So.)
CB	11	Jaylon Braxton (So.)	13	Marquise Robinson (Sr.)
CB	25	Kee'yon Stewart (Sr.)	15	Jaheim Singletary (So.)
NB	3	Doneiko Slaughter (Sr.)	13	Marquise Robinson (Sr.)
S	8	**JAYDEN JOHNSON (SR.)**	16	Miguel Mitchell (Jr.)
S	17	**HUDSON CLARK (SR.)**	18	TJ Metcalf (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	36	Matthew Shipley (Sr.)	KR	16	Isaiah Sategna (So.)
P	37	Devin Bale (Jr.)	PR	16	Isaiah Sategna (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

ARKANSAS RAZORBACKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 46 | SEC PREDICTION: 14 | 2023 RECORD: 4-8, 1-7 SEC

OFFENSE Can former Hogs head coach and new offensive coordinator Bobby Petrino resurrect a lackluster attack that struggled behind poor line play? The Razorbacks will have familiar faces in skill positions with running backs Rashod Dubinion and Isaiah Augstave, tight end Luke Hasz and wide receivers Andrew Armstrong, Tyrone Broden, Isaiah Sategna and Isaac TeSlaa. Transfers dot the depth chart, headlined by quarterback Taylen Green, who took first-team reps all spring, and tailback Ja'Quinden Jackson. The 6-foot-6 Green is fast and skilled as a runner, but his career 59.4 percent completion rate has to improve.

Petrino is well regarded for feeding the ball to his top playmakers, and spring drills indicated he still has that knack.

Head coach Sam Pittman rolled up his sleeves and got to work with new offensive line coach Eric Mateos to pick up the production up front, where returning starters Joshua Braun and Patrick Kutas team with transfers Keyshawn Blackstock, Fernando Carmona and Addison Nichols.

DEFENSE The Razorbacks made huge strides behind first-year defensive coordinator Travis Williams, dropping their total yards allowed by a whopping 108 yards per game to 357.2 and passing yards allowed by 92 yards per game from an NCAA-worst 294.7.

End Landon Jackson and tackles Cameron Ball and Eric Gregory headline the returnees up front, but the Hogs will hit the portal for help.

Williams' linebacking crew had major defections, but sophomores Brad Spence, Carson Dean and Alex Sanford have meshed with transfer Xavian Sorey Jr. to form a solid two-deep.

On the backline, veteran safeties Hudson Clark and Jayden Johnson return, along with sophomore corner Jaylon Braxton, who is poised for a breakout year.

SPECIALISTS Open-field ace Sategna is back as the return specialist. Punter Max Fletcher, who ranked seventh nationally with a 46.9-yard average, transferred, likely pushing Devin Bale into the starter's role. The Hogs have to replace kicker Cam Little, who left after his junior year as the most accurate field-goal kicker (82.8 percent) in school history. Matthew Shipley and kickoff specialist Vito Calvaruso will battle for the job.

FINAL ANALYSIS Winning tight games is the key for a bounce-back from last year's 4-8 fall. Arkansas was 2-2 in one-score games while going 9-4 in 2021, but the Hogs are 2-9 in such games since. If the offense can stay on the field longer and bump up its production a bit, and the defense can maintain last year's level, Arkansas could produce a winning record.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	vs. Ark.-Pine Bluff#
Sept. 7	at Oklahoma St.
Sept. 14	UAB
Sept. 21	at Auburn
Sept. 28	vs. Texas A&M %
Oct. 5	Tennessee
Oct. 19	LSU
Oct. 26	at Mississippi St.
Nov. 2	Ole Miss
Nov. 16	Texas
Nov. 23	Louisiana Tech
Nov. 30	at Missouri

#Little Rock, AR %Arlington, TX

2023 RESULTS (4-8, 1-7 SEC)

Sept. 2	vs. W. Carolina #	W	56-13
Sept. 9	Kent State	W	28-6
Sept. 16	BYU	L	31-38
Sept. 23	at LSU	L	31-34
Sept. 30	vs. Texas A&M %	L	22-34
Oct. 7	at Ole Miss	L	20-27
Oct. 14	at Alabama	L	21-24
Oct. 21	Mississippi State	L	3-7
Nov. 4	at Florida (ot)	W	39-36
Nov. 11	Auburn	L	10-48
Nov. 18	FIU	W	45-20
Nov. 24	Missouri	L	14-48

#Little Rock %Arlington

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Charleston Collins, DL	★★★★
2.	Selman Bridges, CB	★★★
3.	Julius Pope, LB	★★★
4.	Bradley Shaw, LB	★★★
5.	Braylen Russell, RB	★★★
6.	Kavion Henderson, DL	★★★
7.	KJ Jackson, QB	★★★
8.	Justin Logan, LB	★★★
9.	Wyatt Simmons, LB	★★★
10.	Ahkhari Johnson, ATH	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Sam Pittman • Record at School: 23-25 (4 years) • Career Record: 23-25 (4 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Bobby Petrino • Defensive Coordinator: Travis Williams • Location: Fayetteville, Ark.
Stadium: Donald W. Williams Razorback Stadium (76,000)

AUBURN TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 32 | SEC PREDICTION: 10 | 2023 RECORD: 6-7, 3-5 SEC

OFFENSE Auburn's offense needed a revamp after the first year of the Hugh Freeze era. The Tigers had the worst passing offense in the SEC (162.2 ypg) despite the presence of experienced quarterback Payton Thorne, so they revamped the wide receiver room by bringing in four talented true freshmen, including Cam Coleman, who stole the show this spring, and Perry Thompson. Freeze also added experienced transfers like Robert Lewis from Georgia State and KeAndre Lambert-Smith from Penn State. Freeze, known for his offense and play-calling, is expected to take a larger role in the offense this season.

The Tigers return their entire running back room, headlined by the trio of Jarquez Hunter, Damari Alston and Jeremiah Cobb. The Tigers were fourth in the SEC in rushing yards per game (189.0) in 2023. With the passing game presenting more of a threat this season, the expectation is for the rushing game to be just as productive as it was last season.

Auburn brought in Percy Lewis from Mississippi State to anchor the left tackle spot. Center Connor Lew will enter the season as a starter after being one of the best freshman linemen in the country a season ago. Right tackle Izavion Miller is expected to be force in the SEC this season.

DEFENSE Auburn parted ways with defensive coordinator Ron Roberts and hired former Texas A&M DC DJ Durkin. The Tigers have also added depth at positions of need.

Auburn did lose some key pieces to the NFL and to graduation, but the Tigers welcomed transfers Gage Keys (Kansas), Trill Carter (Texas), Philip Blidi (Indiana), Isaiah Raikes (USC/Texas A&M) and Keyron Crawford (Arkansas State) via the portal this offseason. Auburn should be more of a threat to get to the passer in 2024 than a season ago.

The defense has star potential at all three levels. Buck linebacker Jalen McLeod is primed to be one of the best pass-rushers in the SEC; Eugene Asante should thrive in the new defensive system; and cornerbacks Keionte Scott and Kayin Lee should excel on the back end.

SPECIALISTS Auburn may have the best kicking situation in all of college football. Alex McPherson was perfect in 2023, making all 13 field goals and all 40 PATs. Punter Oscar Chapman averaged 44.6 yards per boot in 2023. Scott led the SEC in punt return average last season (14.8).

FINAL ANALYSIS Auburn hopes to make a splash in Freeze's second season. The schedule is more manageable than it has been in a long time. Thorne will have a better cast around him, and a more organized system should keep the offense on the field longer than in previous seasons.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Alabama A&M
Sept. 7	California
Sept. 14	New Mexico
Sept. 21	Arkansas
Sept. 28	Oklahoma
Oct. 5	at Georgia
Oct. 19	at Missouri
Oct. 26	at Kentucky
Nov. 2	Vanderbilt
Nov. 16	ULM
Nov. 23	Texas A&M
Nov. 30	at Alabama

2023 RESULTS (6-7, 3-5 SEC)

Sept. 2	Massachusetts	W	59-14
Sept. 9	at California	W	14-10
Sept. 16	Samford	W	45-13
Sept. 23	at Texas A&M	L	10-27
Sept. 30	Georgia	L	20-27
Oct. 14	at LSU	L	18-48
Oct. 21	Ole Miss	L	21-28
Oct. 28	Mississippi State	W	27-13
Nov. 4	at Vanderbilt	W	31-15
Nov. 11	at Arkansas	W	48-10
Nov. 18	New Mexico State	L	10-31
Nov. 25	Alabama	L	24-27
Dec. 30	vs. Maryland #	L	13-31

#Music City Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Cam Coleman, WR	★★★★★
2.	Walker White, QB	★★★★
3.	Perry Thompson, WR	★★★★
4.	Bryce Cain, WR	★★★★
5.	Amaris Williams, EDGE	★★★★
6.	Joseph Phillips, EDGE	★★★★
7.	Demarcus Riddick, LB	★★★★
8.	Malcolm Simmons, WR	★★★★
9.	Jamonta Waller, EDGE	★★★★
10.	Jay Crawford, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Hugh Freeze • Record at School: 6-7 (1 year) • Career Record: 109-54 (13 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Derrick Nix • Defensive Coordinators: DJ Durkin, Charles Kelly • Location: Auburn, Ala.
Stadium: Jordan-Hare Stadium (87,451)

Jarquez Hunter

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"Among coaches, the jury's still out on if [Hugh] Freeze is the guy that turns that program into an actual title contender, but they're going to be improved going into this season. The biggest question is going to be quarterback, even with [Payton] Thorne back. A lot of people are asking why they haven't been more aggressive in finding a top-end portal QB for two offseasons now. ... Freeze is going to be the play-caller — he won't hand that off to [OC Derrick] Nix — but it's Auburn, so they're used to that with Gus [Malzahn] ... They aren't close to the top end of the league, but they are absolutely better than the [Bryan] Harsin rosters at offensive line and receiver, and probably defensive line, too. Maybe they pick up someone late at QB in the portal; otherwise, expect some improvement from Thorne, but he's not a world-beater. They are headed up, slowly."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	8	Cam Coleman (Fr.)	4	Camden Brown (Jr.)
WR	14	Robert Lewis (Sr.)	18	Sam Jackson V (Sr.)
WR		KeAndre Lambert-Smith (Sr.)		Perry Thompson (Fr.)
LT	73	Percy Lewis (Sr.)	79	Tyler Johnson (Fr.)
LG	52	**DILLON WADE (SR.)**	63	Jaden Muskrat (Jr.)
C	75	**CONNOR LEW (SO.)**	55	Bradyn Joiner (Fr.)
RG	77	Jeremiah Wright (Jr.)	71	Dylan Senda (Fr)
RT	72	**IZAVION MILLER (SR.)**	65	Seth Wilfred (So.)
TE	13	**RIVALDO FAIRWEATHER (SR.)**	86	Luke Deal (Sr.)
QB	1	**PAYTON THORNE (SR.)**	15	Hank Brown (Fr.)
RB	27	**JARQUEZ HUNTER (SR.)**	22	Damari Alston (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	15	**KELDRIC FAULK (SO.)**	10	Amaris Williams (Fr.)
NT	99	**JAYSON JONES (SR.)**		Isaiah Raikes (Sr.)
DT		Philip Blidi (Sr.)	95	Gage Keys (Sr.)
BUCK	35	**JALEN MCLEOD (SR.)**		Keyron Crawford (Jr.)
LB	9	**EUGENE ASANTE (SR.)**	12	Dorian Mausi Jr. (Sr.)
LB	6	Austin Keys (Sr.)	17	Robert Woodyard Jr. (So.)
CB	4	Kayin Lee (So.)	8	Antonio Kite (So.)
CB	0	**KEIONTE SCOTT (SR.)**	36	Jay Crawford (Fr.)
STAR	25	Champ Anthony (Jr.)	5	Terrance Love (So.)
S	1	Jerrin Thompson (Sr.)	3	Laquan Robinson (Jr.)
S	21	Caleb Wooden (Jr.)	19	Sylvester Smith (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	38	Alex McPherson (So.)	KR	21	Brian Battie (Sr.)
P	91	Oscar Chapman (Sr.)	PR	0	Keionte Scott (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Steve Roberts-USA TODAY Sports

Graham Mertz

SCOUTING THE GATORS

"It's do or die time. I think a lot of coaches respect how [Billy] Napier has gone about his business, but there's a level of expectations in the SEC, and you have to build your plans around that accelerated pace. ... The coaching staff is almost totally different, especially on defense. That's the biggest problem we've heard about, that the internal system isn't right there. The roster will be the best they've had — there was a pretty significant drop in talent at the end of the [Dan] Mullen years, but that excuse has run out. ... [QB Graham] Mertz coming back might save Billy's job. The schedule is brutal for them, but they should be able to find a way to bowl."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)					
WR	22	**KAHLEIL JACKSON (JR.)**	88	Marcus Burke (Jr.)
WR	3	**EUGENE WILSON III (SO.)**	0	JaQuavion Fraziars (Sr.)
WR	17	Chimere Dike (Sr.)	6	Andy Jean (So.)
LT	58	**AUSTIN BARBER (JR.)**	57	Devon Manuel (Jr.)
LG	77	Knijeah Harris (Fr.)	53	Bryce Lovett (Fr.)
C	66	**JAKE SLAUGHTER (JR.)**	71	Roderick Kearney (Fr.)
RG	70	**DAMIEON GEORGE JR. (JR.)**	56	Christian Williams (So.)
RT	65	Brandon Crenshaw-Dickson (Sr.)	75	Kamryn Waites (Jr.)
TE	8	Arlis Boardingham (So.)	89	**HAYDEN HANSEN (SO.)**
QB	15	**GRAHAM MERTZ (SR.)**	2	DJ Lagway (Fr.)
RB	1	**MONTRELL JOHNSON JR. (SR.)**	5	Treyaun Webb (Fr.)
DEFENSE (6)				
DE	1	Justus Boone (Jr.)	94	**TYREAK SAPP (JR.)**
NT	99	**CAM JACKSON (SR.)**	21	Desmond Watson (Sr.)
DT	11	Kelby Collins (So.)	88	**CALEB BANKS (JR.)**
JACK	19	T.J. Searcy (So.)	17	LJ McCray (Fr.)
LB	6	**SHEMAR JAMES (JR.)**	29	Jaden Robinson (So.)
LB	10	Grayson "Pup" Howard (So.)	15	Derek Wingo (Sr.)
CB	28	Devin Moore (Jr.)	26	Jameer Grimsley (Fr.)
CB	3	**JASON MARSHALL JR. (SR.)**	2	Ja'Keem Jackson (So.)
STAR	13	Aaron Gates (Fr.)	0	Sharif Denson (So.)
S	14	**JORDAN CASTELL (SO.)**	20	Asa Turner (Sr.)
S	12	DJ Douglas (Sr.)	18	Bryce Thornton (So.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	29	Trey Smack (Jr.)	KR	3	Eugene Wilson III (So.)
P	26	Jeremy Crawshaw (Sr.)	PR	3	Eugene Wilson III (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Matt Pendleton/Gainesville Sun

FLORIDA GATORS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 35 | SEC PREDICTION: 11 | 2023 RECORD: 5-7, 3-5 SEC

OFFENSE Quarterback Graham Mertz was incredibly efficient in his Gators debut, finishing with an SEC-best 72.9 percent completion rate, 20 touchdowns and three interceptions. While Mertz loses leading receiver Ricky Pearsall to the NFL, sophomore Eugene Wilson III will become Mertz's go-to target and replace tailback Trevor Etienne as Florida's home-run threat. Wilson has school legend Percy Harvin's run-catch skill set. Breakout candidates include Chimere Dike, who spent three seasons with Mertz in Madison; sure-handed Kahleil Jackson; dynamic tight end Arlis Boardingham; and promising sophomore Andy Jean.

Montrell Johnson Jr. becomes the bell cow running back after Etienne's transfer to Georgia. Johnson is capable, just not as explosive. But the success of head coach Billy Napier's attack begins up front; UF allowed 22 more sacks and averaged 1.24 fewer yards per carry than in 2022. Left tackle Austin Barber's return to health is key, as is San Diego State transfer tackle Brandon Crenshaw-Dickson's transition to the SEC.

DEFENSE Florida allowed an average of 38.2 points during a season-ending five-game skid, leading Napier to fire his defensive line and secondary coaches. He also hired Ron Roberts when linebackers coach Jay Bateman left for Texas A&M. The retooled staff inherits better talent and experience.

Sophomore linemen Kelby Collins and TJ Searcy will have major roles. Ditto safety Jordan Castell, who recorded a team-high 60 stops. Third-year cornerback Devin Moore returns from an injury-marred season; he'll line up opposite fourth-year starter Jason Marshall Jr. Linebacker Shemar James and end Justus Boone return from knee surgeries. James will pair with imposing South Carolina transfer Grayson "Pup" Howard.

Besides Howard, the transfer portal yielded sixth-year safeties Asa Turner (Washington) and DJ Douglas (Tulane) and high-motor defensive tackle Joey Slackman (Penn). True freshman LJ McCray, the nation's top-rated defensive line prospect at 6-foot-6, 274-pounds, should factor.

SPECIALISTS Jeremy Crawshaw's 48.9-yard average on 42 punts would have ranked second nationally had he qualified. Trey Smack assumed kicking duties in Week 3 and finished 17-of-21 on field goals. The elusive Wilson takes over as the primary returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS Napier has an 11-14 record at Florida, the worst two-year start at the school since Charley Pell in 1979-80. Three consecutive losing seasons would be a first since the 1940s. It is possible, although better talent, depth and experience might be enough to overcome a schedule featuring six teams among the top 17 of the AP's season-ending Top 25.

2024 SCHEDULE	
Aug. 31	Miami
Sept. 7	Samford
Sept. 14	Texas A&M
Sept. 21	at Mississippi St.
Oct. 5	UCF
Oct. 12	at Tennessee
Oct. 19	Kentucky
Nov. 2	vs. Georgia #
Nov. 9	at Texas
Nov. 16	LSU
Nov. 23	Ole Miss
Nov. 30	at Florida State

#Jacksonville, FL

2023 RESULTS (5-7, 3-5 SEC)			
Aug. 31	at Utah	L	11-24
Sept. 9	McNeese State	W	49-7
Sept. 16	Tennessee	W	29-16
Sept. 23	Charlotte	W	22-7
Sept. 30	at Kentucky	L	14-33
Oct. 7	Vanderbilt	W	38-14
Oct. 14	at South Carolina	W	41-39
Oct. 28	vs. Georgia #	L	20-43
Nov. 4	Arkansas (ot)	L	36-39
Nov. 11	at LSU	L	35-52
Nov. 18	at Missouri	L	31-33
Nov. 25	Florida State	L	15-24

#Jacksonville

TOP 10 RECRUITS*	
1. DJ Lagway, QB	★★★★★
2. LJ McCray, DL	★★★★★
3. Brien Taylor, EDGE	★★★★
4. Myles Graham, LB	★★★★
5. Amir Jackson, TE	★★★★
6. Jameer Grimsley, CB	★★★★
7. Aaron Chiles, LB	★★★★
8. KD Daniels, RB	★★★★
9. D'antre Robinson, DL	★★★★
10. Marcus Mascoll, OT	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Billy Napier • Record at School: 11-14 (2 years) • Career Record: 51-26 (6 years)
Offensive Coordinators: Rob Sale, Russ Callaway • Defensive Coordinators: Austin Armstrong, Ron Roberts
Location: Gainesville, Fla. • Stadium: Ben Hill Griffin Stadium (88,548)

GEORGIA BULLDOGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 1 | SEC PREDICTION: 1 | 2023 RECORD: 13-1, 8-0 SEC

OFFENSE Georgia got huge news in January when Carson Beck elected to return for another season, giving the Bulldogs one of the top returning quarterbacks in college football. Beck is coming off one of the most prolific passing seasons in school history, and he has plenty of weapons.

Numerous pass-catchers are generating buzz. Senior slot receiver Dominic Lovett had a tremendous spring. The light came one for fifth-year speedster Arian Smith, and Miami (Fla.) transfer Colbie Young also had a huge showing during spring drills. Georgia is also excited about Florida transfer Trevor Etienne at running back. He brings an element to the offense that was missing last season.

In addition to the deep collection of skill talent, Georgia also brings back four starters on the offensive line and two more players who played meaningful minutes up front a season ago.

DEFENSE Nazir Stackhouse and Warren Brinson are back, and they bring invaluable experience with them. They'll be joined by some ultra-talented guys who got their feet wet in 2023.

Mykel Williams is transitioning from the defensive line to more of a stand-up outside linebacker role in his third season with the team. He's the Bulldogs' most talented front-seven defender, and if the G-Day spring scrimmage is any indication, he is very comfortable in his new role. Inside linebacker should be a strength for UGA once again, as Smael Mondon Jr. is back for his senior season and will be accompanied by Jalon Walker, CJ Allen and Raylen Wilson. Those three guys were thrown into the proverbial fire in 2023 and were forced to grow up quickly.

The secondary has to replace three starters, but there's no shortage of talent. Keep an eye on true freshmen Ellis Robinson IV and KJ Bolden. They were five-star additions in the 2024 class, and both are in the thick of the competition at cornerback and safety, respectively.

SPECIALISTS Georgia's kicking game returns intact. Brett Thorson is back for his final season at Georgia and has been one of the league's most consistent punters over the past two seasons. Peyton Woodring earned the placekicking job in 2023 as a true freshman and found his groove at the midpoint of the season. The return game is still a work in progress, with speedster Anthony Evans III likely to step into a bigger role.

FINAL ANALYSIS Georgia has one of the deepest, most talented rosters in the country. It also returns some of the sport's top players at premium positions, and it isn't protecting a title for the first time in awhile. There's a reason the Bulldogs are viewed by most as the No. 1 team in the country.

2023 RESULTS (13-1, 8-0 SEC)

Sept. 2	Tennessee-Martin	W	48-7
Sept. 9	Ball State	W	45-3
Sept. 16	South Carolina	W	24-14
Sept. 23	UAB	W	49-21
Sept. 30	at Auburn	W	27-20
Oct. 7	Kentucky	W	51-13
Oct. 14	at Vanderbilt	W	37-20
Oct. 28	vs. Florida #	W	43-20
Nov. 4	Missouri	W	30-21
Nov. 11	Ole Miss	W	52-17
Nov. 18	at Tennessee	W	38-10
Nov. 25	at Georgia Tech	W	31-23
Dec. 2	vs. Alabama %	L	24-27
Dec. 30	vs. Florida State &	W	63-3

#Jacksonville %Atlanta &Orange Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	vs. Clemson #
Sept. 7	Tennessee Tech
Sept. 14	at Kentucky
Sept. 28	at Alabama
Oct. 5	Auburn
Oct. 12	Mississippi St.
Oct. 19	at Texas
Nov. 2	vs. Florida %
Nov. 9	at Ole Miss
Nov. 16	Tennessee
Nov. 23	Massachusetts
Nov. 30	Georgia Tech

#Atlanta, GA %Jacksonville, FL

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Ellis Robinson IV, CB ★★★★★
2. Justin Williams, LB ★★★★★
3. Demello Jones, CB ★★★★★
4. KJ Bolden, S ★★★★★
5. Joseph Jonah-Ajonye, DL ★★★★
6. Chris Cole, LB ★★★★
7. Nathaniel Frazier, RB ★★★★
8. Jaden Reddell, TE ★★★★
9. Ryan Puglisi, QB ★★★★
10. Marcus Harrison, OT ★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Kirby Smart • Record at School: 94-16 (8 years)
Career Record: 94-16 (8 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Mike Bobo
Defensive Coordinator: Glenn Schumann • Location: Athens, Ga.
Stadium: Sanford Stadium (92,746)

Carson Beck

SCOUTING THE BULLDOGS

"With [Nick] Saban retired, this is the best overall program in college football right now. If the current Ohio State staff had a national title, you might make an argument there, but entering '24, this is the standard. ... If you're looking for a fault, it might be that all of [QB Carson] Beck's safety-valve options at receiver and tight end are gone. Obviously, they've brought in some studs to add to what they've recruited, but having a Brock Bowers is like a cheat code for a young QB. This is Beck's offense now, so his development this offseason is crucial. ... [Nazir] Stackhouse and [Warren] Brinson are both back, and that defensive line should be better. They weren't bad, but by Kirby Smart's standards, there was a step back after Jalen Carter and those guys left. ... They're still the first team to put in the conference title and playoff conversation."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (9)

WR	9	**RARA THOMAS (SR.)**	8	Colbie Young (Sr.)
WR	6	**DOMONIC LOVETT (SR.)**	5	Anthony Evans III (So.)
WR	86	**DILLON BELL (JR.)**	11	Arian Smith (Sr.)
LT	71	**EARNEST GREENE III (SO.)**	57	Monroe Freeling (So.)
LG	53	**DYLAN FAIRCHILD (JR.)**	56	Micah Morris (Jr.)
C	55	Jared Wilson (Jr.)	74	Drew Bobo (So.)
RG	69	**TATE RATLEDGE (SR.)**	70	Daniel Calhoun (Fr.)
RT	73	**XAVIER TRUSS (SR.)**	52	Michael Uini (Fr.)
TE	4	**OSCAR DELP (JR.)**	7	Lawson Luckie (So.)
QB	15	**CARSON BECK (SR.)**	14	Gunner Stockton (So.)
RB	1	Trevor Etienne (Jr.)	0	Roderick Robinson II (So.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	93	Tyrion Ingram-Dawkins (Jr.)	29	Gabe Harris (So.)
DT	97	Warren Brinson (Sr.)	44	Jordan Hall (So.)
NT	78	**NAZIR STACKHOUSE (SR.)**	52	Christen MIller (So.)
EDGE	13	**MYKEL WILLIAMS (JR.)**	32	**CHAZ CHAMBLISS (SR.)**
ILB	3	CJ Allen (So.)	11	Jalon Walker (Jr.)
ILB	2	**SMAEL MONDON JR. (SR.)**	5	Raylen Wilson (So.)
STAR	8	Joenel Aguero (So.)	31	Kyron Jones (Fr.)
CB	6	**DAYLEN EVERETTE (JR.)**	1	Ellis Robinson IV (Fr.)
CB	12	Julian Humphrey (So.)	7	Daniel Harris (Fr.)
SS	17	Dan Jackson (Sr.)	20	JaCorey Thomas (So.)
FS	24	**MALAKI STARKS (JR.)**	4	KJ Bolden (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	91	Peyton Woodring (So.)	KR	86	Dillon Bell (Jr.)
P	92	Brett Thorson (Sr.)	PR	5	Anthony Evans III (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Christopher Hanewinckel-USA TODAY Sports

Barion Brown

SCOUTING THE WILDCATS

"After the Texas A&M flirtation with [Mark] Stoops, a lot of us think he's probably going to end up retiring from Kentucky in a few years. He'll leave the game at a smart age, the way his brother [Bob] did. Before that, they've got to rework the offense again. It's remarkable in this league how often they lose offensive coordinators and the program doesn't collapse. ... They might have one of the best defensive lines in the league, and they're really good at playing the run. The measure for success is if they can install another new scheme to fit another new transfer QB [Brock Vandagriff from Georgia].

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	7	**BARION BROWN (JR.)**	13	Fred Farrier II (Jr.)
WR	6	**DANE KEY (JR.)**	5	Anthony Brown-Stephens (So.)
WR	9	Ja'Mori Maclin (Jr.)	17	Hardley Gilmore IV (Fr.)
LT	69	**MARQUES COX (SR.)**	74	Courtland Ford (Sr.)
LG	73	**DYLAN RAY (JR.)**	67	Paul Rodriguez (Jr.)
C	75	**ELI COX (SR.)**	50	Koby Keenum (Fr.)
RG	62	**JAGER BURTON (JR.)**	52	Jalen Farmer (So.)
RT	54	Gerald Mincey (Sr.)	74	Courtland Ford (Sr.)
TE	85	Jordan Dingle (Jr.)	84	Josh Kattus (Jr.)
QB	12	Brock Vandagriff (Jr.)	11	Beau Allen (Sr.)
RB	4	DeaMonte Trayanum (Sr.)	0	Demie Sumo-Karngbaye (Sr.)

DEFENSE (9)

DE	8	**OCTAVIOUS OXENDINE (SR.)**	90	Tre'vonn Rybka (Sr.)
DT	0	**DEONE WALKER (JR.)**	92	Kahlil Saunders (Jr.)
NT	97	Josaih Hayes (Sr.)	9	**KEESHAWN SILVER (JR.)**
OLB	13	**J.J. WEAVER (SR.)**	42	Tyreese Fearbry (So.)
MLB	54	**D'ERYK JACKSON (SR.)**	17	Daveren Rayner (Sr.)
WLB	2	Jamon Dumas-Johnson (Sr.)	17	Daveren Rayner (Sr.)
CB	31	**MAXWELL HAIRSTON (JR.)**	10	Jantzen Dunn (Jr.)
CB	6	Jonquis "JQ" Hardaway (Jr.)	21	Nasir Addison (So.)
NB	3	**ALEX AFARI JR. (JR.)**	22	Grant Godfrey (Fr.)
SS	11	**ZION CHILDRESS (SR.)**	4	Kristian Story (Sr.)
FS	25	**JORDAN LOVETT (JR.)**	14	Ty Bryant (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	16	Alex Raynor (Sr.)	KR	7 Barion Brown (Jr.)
P	93	Wilson Berry (Jr.)	PR	7 Barion Brown (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Nathan Ray Seebeck-USA TODAY Sports

KENTUCKY WILDCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 38 | SEC PREDICTION: 12 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 3-5 SEC

OFFENSE Head coach Mark Stoops hired Bush Hamdan from Boise State to be the Wildcats offensive coordinator after Liam Coen left for the NFL. Hamdan will have former 5-star prospect and Georgia transfer Brock Vandagriff to direct an offense that is losing NFL Draft picks Devin Leary (quarterback) and Ray Davis (running back). Vandagriff never was able to find much time on the field while at Georgia. Now, the SEC will finally get to see what Vandagriff has to offer.

The running back room is highlighted by former Ohio State Buckeye DeaMonte "Chip" Trayanum, who ran for 373 yards and three touchdowns a year ago. At wide receiver, Barion Brown and Dane Key are both back for their junior seasons and form one of the best tandems in the SEC. Last season, Brown hauled in 43 passes for 539 yards and four touchdowns, while Key led the Wildcats in receiving with 42 receptions for 636 yards and six scores.

The offense will come down to how well the offensive line, highlighted by returning left tackle Marques Cox, can play this season.

DEFENSE Kentucky's defense was second in the SEC last season against the run, allowing only 113.1 yards per game on the ground. A lot of that run-stuffing comes courtesy of the big man up front, Deone Walker, who could be a top-10 pick in the 2025 NFL Draft. A year ago, Walker had 55 tackles and 7.5 sacks. The 6-foot-6, 348-pounder is a monster up front and will be a problem for opposing offenses all season.

The Wildcats also will get back corner Maxwell Hairston, who led the team with five interceptions a year ago. He should be the shutdown outside cover man for Kentucky's defense this season. Another Georgia transfer who will look to make some noise is Jamon Dumas-Johnson, who headlines the linebackers. Dumas-Johnson had 34 tackles and 3.5 sacks last season for the Bulldogs' elite defense.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Alex Raynor was 10-of-11 on field goals a season ago, including 5-of-6 from 40-plus yards, and will be a true weapon. Brown will return kicks for the Wildcats again this season after leading college football with three kickoffs returned for touchdowns in 2023.

FINAL ANALYSIS Kentucky added weapons on both sides of the ball via the portal. This season could come down to the trenches. The offensive line struggled in 2023, and aside from Walker, how good can this defensive line be? If Vandagriff gets adequate protection and lives up to his billing, the Wildcats can win eight or more games. If he struggles with a challenging schedule, the Wildcats will have to fight to earn bowl eligibility.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Southern Miss
Sept. 7	South Carolina
Sept. 14	Georgia
Sept. 21	Ohio
Sept. 28	at Ole Miss
Oct. 12	Vanderbilt
Oct. 19	at Florida
Oct. 26	Auburn
Nov. 2	at Tennessee
Nov. 16	Murray State
Nov. 23	at Texas
Nov. 30	Louisville

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 3-5 SEC)

Sept. 2	Ball State	W	44-14
Sept. 9	Eastern Kentucky	W	28-17
Sept. 16	Akron	W	35-3
Sept. 23	at Vanderbilt	W	45-28
Sept. 30	Florida	W	33-14
Oct. 7	at Georgia	L	13-51
Oct. 14	Missouri	L	21-38
Oct. 28	Tennessee	L	27-33
Nov. 4	at Mississippi St.	W	24-3
Nov. 11	Alabama	L	21-49
Nov. 18	at South Carolina	L	14-17
Nov. 25	at Louisville	W	38-31
Dec. 29	vs. Clemson #	L	35-38

#Gator Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Terhyon Nichols, CB	★★★★
2.	Cam Dooley, ATH	★★★★
3.	Aba Salm, OL	★★★★
4.	Jaden Smith, LB	★★★★
5.	Brian Robinson, EDGE	★★★★
6.	Quaysheed Scott, CB	★★★★
7.	Cutter Boley, QB	★★★★
8.	Jason Patterson, RB	★★★★
9.	Jacob Smith, EDGE	★★★
10.	Hardley Gilmore, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mark Stoops • Record at School: 73-65 (11 years) • Career Record: 73-65 (11 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Bush Hamdan • Defensive Coordinator: Brad White • Location: Lexington, Ky.
Stadium: Kroger Field (61,000)

LSU TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 11 | SEC PREDICTION: 6 | 2023 RECORD: 10-3, 6-2 SEC

OFFENSE There is massive change at the top for college football's top offense in 2023. Garrett Nussmeier takes over at quarterback for Heisman Trophy winner Jayden Daniels, and there's also a new play-caller in Joe Sloan. Nussmeier started LSU's ReliaQuest Bowl win over Wisconsin, throwing for 395 yards and leading the Tigers on a 98-yard game-winning drive. While mobile, Nussmeier will be a classic pocket passer and not the 1,000-yard rusher Daniels was.

The biggest task for LSU's offense is building a running game around budding star Kaleb Jackson, veteran Josh Williams and a host of newcomers. Head coach Brian Kelly believes that Kyren Lacy, who spent a 2023 apprenticeship at the swift feet of Malik Nabers and Brian Thomas, is poised for a breakout season. Also watch for Chris Hilton Jr., Aaron Anderson and transfers CJ Daniels (Liberty) and Zavion Thomas (Mississippi State). Expect tight end Mason Taylor to be a big part of LSU's short passing game to aid the rushing attack.

The offensive line may be the strength of the team. It's bookended by juniors Will Campbell and Emery Jones Jr. at the tackle spots. The only question mark there is redshirt freshman DJ Chester taking over at center.

DEFENSE Kelly fired coordinator Matt House and his assistants after the Tigers allowed a woeful 416.6 yards and 28.0 points per game in 2023. Blake Baker, formerly at Missouri, is now tasked with making LSU's defense respectable, if not great. He has a terrific centerpiece to work with in linebacker Harold Perkins Jr., who, in a controversial move, returns to inside linebacker, where he was somewhat ineffective last season. He starts alongside Greg Penn III, a steady presence with 89 tackles in 2023.

The defense will probably only go as far as its linemen take it. Tackle Jacobian Guillory and end Sai'vion Jones have to shine, though Kelly's staff frantically sought to build depth through the portal. The secondary at least has experience, led by Major Burns (93 tackles) at the Star position.

SPECIALISTS Damian Ramos returns after leading the FBS in extra points made and attempted (77-of-77) and making 12-of-15 field-goal tries. Punter Peyton Todd's next collegiate boot will be his first. Kelly is emphasizing the return game, with Thomas handling most of the duties.

FINAL ANALYSIS In Year 3 of Kelly's tenure, it's time for the Tigers to take a step forward, and that means securing a spot in the expanded College Football Playoff. Getting there depends on two key things: finding enough of a ground game to pair with what should still be a potent passing game and improving the defense enough to be at least average. Answer those two questions, and the Tigers are top-12 material for sure.

2024 SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	vs. USC #
Sept. 7	Nicholls State
Sept. 14	at South Carolina
Sept. 21	UCLA
Sept. 28	South Alabama
Oct. 12	Ole Miss
Oct. 19	at Arkansas
Oct. 26	at Texas A&M
Nov. 9	Alabama
Nov. 16	at Florida
Nov. 23	Vanderbilt
Nov. 30	Oklahoma

#Las Vegas, NV

2023 RESULTS (10-3, 6-2 SEC)

Sept. 3	vs. Florida State #	L	24-45
Sept. 9	Grambling State	W	72-10
Sept. 16	at Mississippi St.	W	41-14
Sept. 23	Arkansas	W	34-31
Sept. 30	at Ole Miss	L	49-55
Oct. 7	at Missouri	W	49-39
Oct. 14	Auburn	W	48-18
Oct. 21	Army	W	62-0
Nov. 4	at Alabama	L	28-42
Nov. 11	Florida	W	52-35
Nov. 18	Georgia State	W	56-14
Nov. 25	Texas A&M	W	42-30
Jan. 1	vs. Wisconsin %	W	35-31

#Orlando %ReliaQuest Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Weston Davis, OT	★★★★★
2.	Dominick McKinley, DL	★★★★★
3.	Trey'Dez Green, TE	★★★★★
4.	Gabriel Reliford, DL	★★★★
5.	Dashawn McBryde, S	★★★★
6.	Kylan Billiot, WR	★★★★
7.	Caden Durham, RB	★★★★
8.	CJ Jackson, EDGE	★★★★
9.	Ethan Calloway, OT	★★★★
10.	Joel Rogers, S	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brian Kelly • Record at School: 20-7 (2 years) • Career Record: 299-103-2 • Offensive Coordinator: Joe Sloan • Defensive Coordinator: Blake Baker • Location: Baton Rouge, La. • Stadium: Tiger Stadium (102,321)

Harold Perkins Jr.

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"They've been sort of off schedule, you could say; they had the Heisman quarterback a little too soon, because if you plugged [Jayden] Daniels into this Year 3 staff and roster, I think they could contend for a conference title and playoff seed. ... This is the best assistant coach roster [Brian] Kelly's had at LSU, and maybe the best of his entire career. It's a bunch of killers in recruiting, guys who are veteran culture builders in the league. ... [Joe] Sloan is going to work out really nicely as the OC. The quarterback [Garrett Nussmeier] isn't as talented as Daniels, but he can manage the talent around him. ... They could still make the playoff as an at-large this season if the defense jells the way it looks. Blake [Baker] is a sharp guy. They could be brutal to play by season's end."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	2	**KYREN LACY (SR.)**	4	CJ Daniels (Sr.)
WR	17	Chris Hilton Jr. (Jr.)	12	Kyle Parker (Fr.)
WR	11	Zavion Thomas (Jr.)	1	Aaron Anderson (So.)
LT	66	**WILL CAMPBELL (JR.)**	67	Bo Bordelon (So.)
LG	72	**GARRETT DELLINGER (SR.)**	65	Paul Mubenga (Fr.)
C	79	DJ Chester (Fr.)	78	Coen Echols (Fr.)
RG	70	**MILES FRAZIER (SR.)**	67	Bo Bordelon (So.)
RT	50	**EMERY JONES JR. (JR.)**	71	Tyree Adams (Fr.)
TE	86	**MASON TAYLOR (JR.)**	84	Mac Markway (So.)
QB	13	Garrett Nussmeier (Jr.)	15	AJ Swann (Jr.)
RB	28	Kaleb Jackson (So.)	27	Josh Williams (Sr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	35	**SAI'VION JONES (SR.)**	94	Paris Shand (Sr.)
DT	90	Jacobian Guillory (Sr.)	95	Shone Washington (So.)
DT	92	Jalen Lee (Sr.)		Gio Paez (Sr.)
DE	13	Bradyn Swinson (Sr.)	16	Da'Shawn Womack (So.)
ILB	30	**GREG PENN III (SR.)**	33	West Weeks (Sr.)
ILB	4	**HAROLD PERKINS JR. (JR.)**	40	Whit Weeks (So.)
STAR	8	**MAJOR BURNS (SR.)**	23	Kylin Jackson (Fr.)
CB	26	Ashton Stamps (So.)	17	Jyaire Brown (Jr.)
CB	25	Javien Toviano (So.)	24	**ZY ALEXANDER (SR.)**
SS	14	Jardin Gilbert (Jr.)	10	Dashawn McBryde (Fr.)
FS	15	**SAGE RYAN (JR.)**	6	Jordan Allen (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	34	Damian Ramos (Jr.)	KR	11	Zavion Thomas (Jr.)
P	38	Peyton Todd (Jr.)	PR	11	Zavion Thomas (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

John David Mercer-USA TODAY Sports

Corey Ellington

SCOUTING THE BULLDOGS

"The relationship with [former head coach Will] Arnett and the university was strained from the start. It wasn't a great fit for a first-time head coaching job, and the circumstances around [former head coach Mike] Leach's passing made it tough for everyone. I don't think anyone is at fault there, it just wasn't going to work out so they moved fast. ... Jeff Lebby is going to give them a kind of Lane Kiffin energy and obviously a similar offense, and he's going to attack recruiting skill position guys. The biggest question in Starkville is how serious are they going to get in NIL? Their expectation is to keep up with Ole Miss, but right now it's not close in recruiting."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (0)

WR	18	Jordan Mosley (Jr.)	81	Antonio Harmon (Jr.)
WR	8	Creed Whittemore (So.)	11	Jaden Walley (Sr.)
WR	1	Kelly Akharaiyi (Sr.)	6	Kevin Coleman (Jr.)
LT	66	Makylan Pounders (Jr.)	79	Jackson LaHue (So.)
LG	75	Jacoby Jackson (Jr.)	52	Grant Jackson (Sr.)
C	67	Ethan Miner (Sr.)	72	Canon Boone (Jr.)
RG	76	Albert Reese IV (Jr.)	52	Grant Jackson (Sr.)
RT	55	Leon Bell (Jr.)	53	Malik Ellis (So.)
TE	82	Seydou Traore (Jr.)	84	Justin Ball (Sr.)
QB	2	Blake Shapen (Sr.)	16	Chris Parson (Fr.)
RB	24	Keyvone Lee (Sr.)	25	Jeffery Pittman (Sr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	91	Deonte Anderson (Jr.)	98	Ashun Shepphard (Jr.)
NG	35	Kalvin Dinkins (So.)	92	Eric Taylor (Jr.)
DT	9	**DE'MONTE RUSSELL (SR.)**	23	Trevion Williams (So.)
SLB	36	Donterry Russell (So.)	11	Ty Cooper (Jr.)
MLB	7	Stone Blanton (Jr.)	26	J.P. Purvis (Sr.)
WLB	5	John Lewis (Sr.)	31	Javae Gilmore (So.)
CB	14	Brice Pollock (So.)	6	Traveon Wright (Fr.)
CB	18	Khamauri Rogers (So.)	29	Kelley Jones (Fr.)
STAR	3	Brylan Lanier (Jr.)	21	Hunter Washington (Jr.)
SS	20	Isaac Smith (So.)	12	Tyler Woodard (Jr.)
FS	10	**COREY ELLINGTON (SR.)**	15	Kobi Albert (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	80	Kyle Ferrie (So.)	KR	6 Kevin Coleman (Jr.)
P	83	Zachary Haynes (Sr.)	PR	6 Kevin Coleman (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Nathan Ray Seebeck-USA TODAY Sports

MISSISSIPPI STATE BULLDOGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 63 | SEC PREDICTION: 15 | 2023 RECORD: 5-7, 1-7 SEC

OFFENSE There is plenty of uncertainty in new head coach and offensive mastermind Jeff Lebby's debut season. What isn't uncertain is Lebby's track record. He's guided some of the country's most explosive offenses as a coordinator the last half decade and has always brought a big-play threat. Since 2019, Lebby's offenses have finished in the top 25 nationally in plays from scrimmage of 20 yards or more every season.

There are intriguing pieces in place for Lebby. Baylor transfer Blake Shapen likely has the edge to be MSU's starting quarterback and was incredibly productive in his time with the Bears. Last season, in eight games, the 2022 All-Big 12 Honorable Mention performer passed for 2,188 yards and 13 touchdowns while rushing for four more scores.

Offensive success will depend upon the production from a promising, but largely unproven, crop of receivers headlined by Bulldog veteran Jordan Mosley, transfers Kelly Akharaiyi (UTEP) and Kevin Coleman (Louisville) and a handful of highly touted freshmen.

DEFENSE State lost a ton of production from last year's squad on the defensive side. Linebackers Nathaniel Watson and Jett Johnson, who finished first and second, respectively, in the SEC in tackles each of the last two years, are now off to pursue pro football dreams. So, too, are guys like longtime MSU defensive line standout Jaden Crumedy and cornerback Decamerion Richardson.

In all, seven of MSU's top eight tacklers from a season ago are no longer with the program. That'll leave names like experienced linemen De'Monte Russell and Deonte Anderson, linebackers John Lewis and South Carolina transfer Stone Blanton, and defensive backs Corey Ellington and Issac Smith to shoulder the load for first-year defensive coordinator Coleman Hutzler.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Kyle Ferrie will have the inside track to back up a debut campaign in which he made 16-of-22 field goals. The Dawgs will have a new punter with FCS Southeast Missouri State transfer Zachary Haynes possibly being that guy. The electric Lideatrick Griffin's Bulldog career is done, but Akharaiyi, Coleman, Creed Whittemore, Jaden Walley and more give State plenty of options on returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Mississippi State is a new-look team pretty much across the board. The Bulldogs also face a daunting schedule that includes road trips to Texas, Georgia and Ole Miss. Given all that, if MSU can simply return to bowl eligibility after missing out on the postseason last year for the first time since 2009, Lebby's first season in Starkville would have to be viewed as a success.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Eastern Kentucky
Sept. 7	at Arizona State
Sept. 14	Toledo
Sept. 21	Florida
Sept. 28	at Texas
Oct. 12	at Georgia
Oct. 19	Texas A&M
Oct. 26	Arkansas
Nov. 2	Massachusetts
Nov. 9	at Tennessee
Nov. 23	Missouri
Nov. 30	at Ole Miss

2023 RESULTS (5-7, 1-7 SEC)

Sept. 2	Southeastern Louisiana	W	48-7
Sept. 9	Arizona (ot)	W	31-24
Sept. 16	LSU	L	14-41
Sept. 23	at South Carolina	L	30-37
Sept. 30	Alabama	L	17-40
Oct. 7	Western Michigan	W	41-28
Oct. 21	at Arkansas	W	7-3
Oct. 28	at Auburn	L	13-27
Nov. 4	Kentucky	L	3-24
Nov. 11	at Texas A&M	L	10-51
Nov. 18	Southern Miss	W	41-20
Nov. 23	Ole Miss	L	7-17

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Xavier Gayten, ATH	★★★★
2.	Mario Craver, WR	★★★★
3.	Josaiah Knight, EDGE	★★★★
4.	JJ Harrell, WR	★★★★
5.	Brylan Lanier, S	★★★★
6.	Braylon Burnside, WR	★★★
7.	JaCorey Whitted, TE	★★★
8.	Johnnie Daniels, RB	★★★
9.	Michael Van Buren, QB	★★★
10.	Jimothy Lewis, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Lebby • Record at School: First season • Career Record: First season
Offensive Coordinator: Jeff Lebby • Defensive Coordinator: Coleman Hutzler • Location: Starkville, Miss.
Stadium: Davis Wade Stadium at Scott Field (60,311)

MISSOURI TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 10 | SEC PREDICTION: 5 | 2023 RECORD: 11-2, 6-2 SEC

OFFENSE Missouri enjoyed its best season since 2014, going 11-2 and finishing eighth in the AP poll. Coordinator Kirby Moore's offense played a big part in that surge, as the Tigers leapt from 86th in points per game to the top 30. A lot of the reasons for said improvement return.

Quarterback Brady Cook threw for 3,317 yards last fall, and he gets nearly all of his receiving corps back. That includes veterans Theo Wease Jr. and Mookie Cooper and tight end Brett Norfleet, a late-season star as a freshman, but we're primarily talking about former blue-chipper and potential All-American Luther Burden III. He went for 1,212 receiving yards as a sophomore, and he's back for a third season in Columbia.

The run game does need a new bell cow. Cody Schrader, the Division II transfer-turned-SEC leading rusher, is off to the pros, and two of his blockers, including All-SEC left tackle Javon Foster, are also gone. Head coach Eliah Drinkwitz will ask transfers Marcus Carroll (Georgia State) and Nate Noel (Appalachian State) to carry quite a bit of the load, but the passing game means this offense's ceiling is still awfully high.

DEFENSE Corey Batoon takes over as coordinator for a unit that found its rhythm late in 2023, allowing 14 or fewer points in four of its last six games. Mizzou returns key veterans in breakout pass rusher Johnny Walker Jr., tackle Kristian Williams, linebackers Chuck Hicks and Triston Newson, safety Joseph Charleston and a dynamite nickel safety in Daylan Carnell. But three of last year's top four tackles are gone, as are three NFL-bound defensive backs and, most importantly, end Darius Robinson.

Drinkwitz added five power-conference transfers in the winter window, and tackle Chris McClellan (Florida) and cornerback Toriano Pride Jr. (Clemson) were spring standouts. Five-star freshman Williams Nwaneri will be expected to contribute quickly as well. Batoon led a couple of excellent defenses at South Alabama. For the Tigers to fulfill College Football Playoff hopes, he'll have to hit the ground running.

SPECIALISTS After a long run as Mizzou's Thiccer Kicker, Harrison Mevis is gone, leaving a major hole to fill for Blake Craig or whoever wins the placekicking job. Luke Bauer and Murray State transfer Orion Phillips will battle for starting punter.

FINAL ANALYSIS This is a veteran team. The Tigers will need to find depth answers on defense and, like last year, eke out a few tight win, but the schedule is as friendly as it will ever be, and you have to like your odds in any game when you have Luther Burden III and your opponent does not.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Murray State
Sept. 7	Buffalo
Sept. 14	Boston College
Sept. 21	Vanderbilt
Oct. 5	at Texas A&M
Oct. 12	at Massachusetts
Oct. 19	Auburn
Oct. 26	at Alabama
Nov. 9	Oklahoma
Nov. 16	at South Carolina
Nov. 23	at Mississippi St.
Nov. 30	Arkansas

2023 RESULTS (11-2, 6-2 SEC)

Aug. 31	South Dakota	W	35-10
Sept. 9	Middle Tennessee	W	23-19
Sept. 16	Kansas State	W	30-27
Sept. 23	vs. Memphis #	W	34-27
Sept. 30	at Vanderbilt	W	38-21
Oct. 7	LSU	L	39-49
Oct. 14	at Kentucky	W	38-21
Oct. 21	South Carolina	W	34-12
Nov. 4	at Georgia	L	21-30
Nov. 11	Tennessee	W	36-7
Nov. 18	Florida	W	33-31
Nov. 24	at Arkansas	W	48-14
Dec. 29	vs. Ohio State %	W	14-3

#St. Louis %Cotton Bowl Classic

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Williams Nwaneri, EDGE ★★★★★
2. Trajen Greco, S ★★★★
3. Courtney Crutchfield, WR ★★★★
4. Kewan Lacy, RB ★★★★
5. Elias Williams, DL ★★★★
6. Brian Huff, LB ★★★★
7. Jaylen Brown, EDGE ★★★★
8. Jayven Richardson, OT ★★★★
9. Cameron Keys, CB ★★★
10. Aidan Glover, QB ★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Eliah Drinkwitz • Record at School: 28-21 (4 years) • Career Record: 40-22 (5 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Kirby Moore • Defensive Coordinators: Corey Batoon, D.J. Smith • Location: Columbia, Mo.
Stadium: Faurot Field at Memorial Stadium (62,621)

Luther Burden III

SCOUTING THE TIGERS

"They'll go as far as that quarterback [Brady Cook] can take them. If they keep him healthy, they could repeat what they did last year. I think a lot of other staffs are expecting them to slump just because of who they are, but give them credit; they've put together a really talented team. ... They're weaker in the secondary than last year, and they have to replace [Cody] Schrader, and the league is getting harder with no more Eastern division and adding the two Big 12 teams. I think they could be as good as last season on offense, and the defensive losses and league changes might be what keeps them from finishing that high again."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	1	**THEO WEASE JR. (SR.)**		Courtney Crutchfield (Fr.)
WR	5	**MOOKIE COOPER (SR.)**	2	Marquis Johnson (So.)
WR	3	**LUTHER BURDEN III (JR.)**	10	Mekhi Miller (Jr.)
LT	70	Cayden Green (So.)	78	Brandon Solis (Fr.)
LG	74	Cam'Ron Johnson (Sr.)	73	Tristan Wilson (So.)
C	55	**CONNOR TOLLISON (JR.)**	69	Drake Heismeyer (Sr.)
RG	66	Logan Reichert (Fr.)	75	Mitchell Walters (Sr.)
RT	79	**ARMAND MEMBOU (JR.)**	76	Jayven Richardson (So.)
TE	87	**BRETT NORFLEET (SO.)**	80	Tyler Stephens (Sr.)
QB	12	**BRADY COOK (SR.)**		Drew Pyne (Jr.)
RB	9	Marcus Carroll (Sr.)	8	Nate Noel (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	9	Zion Young (Jr.)		Williams Nwaneri (Fr.)
DT	5	**KRISTIAN WILLIAMS (SR.)**	33	Marquis Gracial (So.)
DT	7	Chris McClellan (Jr.)	10	Sterling Webb (Jr.)
EDGE	15	**JOHNNY WALKER JR. (SR.)**	19	Darris Smith (Jr.)
LB	30	**CHUCK HICKS (SR.)**	16	Brayshawn Littlejohn (Fr.)
LB	14	Triston Newson (Sr.)	11	Corey Flagg (Sr.)
NB	13	**DAYLAN CARNELL (JR.)**	3	Sidney Williams (Sr.)
CB	12	Dreyden Norwood (Jr.)	26	Shamar McNeil (Fr.)
CB	2	Toriano Pride Jr. (Jr.)	8	Marcus Clarke (Sr.)
S	28	**JOSEPH CHARLESTON (SR.)**	0	Phillip Roche (So.)
S	1	Marvin Burks Jr. (So.)	4	Tre'Vez Johnson (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	19	Blake Craig (Fr.)	KR	2	Marquis Johnson (So.)
P	93	Luke Bauer (Jr.)	PR	3	Luther Burden III (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Jay Biggerstaff-USA TODAY Sports

Danny Stutsman

SCOUTING THE SOONERS

"They're starting to round out on defense to a unit you'd expect Brent [Venables] to be coaching at Clemson. That's the good news entering the SEC. The bad news is that they could be bad on the O-line if they can't pull some guys together late in the portal. ... Oklahoma is a legit top program, but the secret to the SEC is the line play, and they won't be able to do what they want on offense if they can't protect against the average DL in this league. ... If you're looking for a new offense, it won't be drastically different from [former offensive coordinator Jeff] Lebby, but they've got to run the ball more effectively than they did when he was there. Seth [Littrell] is a made-to-order kind of OC, a really experienced guy who is going to scheme to fit."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	5	Andrel Anthony (Sr.)	4	Nic Anderson (So.)
WR	3	**JALIL FAROOQ (SR.)**	1	Jayden Gibson (Jr.)
WR	6	Deion Burks (Jr.)	17	Jaquaize Pettaway (So.)
LT	76	Jacob Sexton (Jr.)	70	Michael Tarquin (Sr.)
LG	54	Febechi Nwaiwu (Jr.)	77	Heath Ozaeta (Fr.)
C		Branson Hickman (Sr.)	52	Troy Everett (Jr.)
RG	66	Geirean Hatchett (Sr.)	56	Eugene Brooks (Fr.)
RT	58	Spencer Brown (Sr.)	79	Jake Taylor (So.)
TE	87	Jake Roberts (Sr.)	10	Bauer Sharp (Jr.)
QB	11	Jackson Arnold (So.)	16	Casey Thompson (Sr.)
RB	27	**GAVIN SAWCHUK (SO.)**	2	Jovantae Barnes (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	30	Trace Ford (Sr.)	32	R Mason Thomas (Jr.)
NT	95	Da'Jon Terry (Sr.)	96	Davon Sears (Sr.)
DT		Damonic Williams (Jr.)	56	Gracen Halton (Jr.)
DE	40	**ETHAN DOWNS (SR.)**	34	Adepoju Adebawore (So.)
LB	28	**DANNY STUTSMAN (SR.)**	10	Kip Lewis (So.)
LB	7	**JAREN KANAK (JR.)**	11	Kobie McKinzie (So.)
CB	9	**GENTRY WILLIAMS (JR.)**	26	Kani Walker (Jr.)
CB	5	Woodi Washington (Sr.)	12	Dez Malone (Sr.)
S	15	Kendel Dolby (Sr.)	1	**DASAN MCCULLOUGH (JR.)**
SS	2	**BILLY BOWMAN JR. (SR.)**	22	Peyton Bowen (So.)
FS	3	Robert Spears-Jennings (Jr.)	18	Erik McCarty (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	34	Zach Schmit (Sr.)	KR	3 Jalil Farooq (Sr.)
P	48	Luke Elzinga (Sr.)	PR	3 Jalil Farooq (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Nathan J. Fish-USA TODAY Sports

OKLAHOMA SOONERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 16 | SEC PREDICTION: 8 | 2023 RECORD: 10-3, 7-2 BIG 12

OFFENSE Oklahoma's big-picture transition — leaving the relative comfort of the Big 12 for the snake pit of the SEC — revolves around a more micro transition: Jackson Arnold's growth at quarterback. The former 5-star recruit takes over for Dillon Gabriel, who left for Oregon through the transfer portal, and stands firmly in charge, taking a role he didn't always thrive in a year ago when Gabriel was injured or already out the door ahead of the bowl game. In that game, a 38-24 loss to Arizona, Arnold was equal parts good, bad and ugly, throwing for 361 yards and two touchdowns but also committing four of Oklahoma's six turnovers.

The Sooners look to rally around a fully prepped Arnold with a new offensive coordinator in Seth Littrell, along with more newness as only four players who started as many as six games return on offense.

Veteran receivers Jalil Farooq, Andrel Anthony and Nic Anderson at least give Arnold familiar faces to target as playmakers. Purdue transfer Deion Burks adds more proven production to the group.

The line, however, is fully rebuilt, and the running back position needs a game-changer, although Gavin Sawchuk closed 2023 strong with five straight 100-yard games.

DEFENSE Eleven of the top 13 tacklers return, led by two first-team All-Big 12 performers in linebacker Danny Stutsman and safety Billy Bowman Jr. Stutsman led the unit with 104 tackles, while Bowman's six interceptions tied him for third nationally. The rugged Stutsman provides production and presence as the leader of a defense with attitude and upside, returning six starters. Bowman opted to return rather than jump to the NFL, giving the secondary a ball-hawking veteran leader.

Woodi Washington is highly experienced at one corner spot, and Dez Malone could be an impact transfer from San Diego State. Overall, the defensive backs need to stay healthy and show more consistency.

The defensive line picked up a key transfer in Damonic Williams, who clogged the middle for two seasons at TCU.

SPECIALISTS The Sooners return primary kicker Zach Schmit, punter Luke Elzinga and a capable return man in Farooq. The kicking game has been a strength and should continue to be an asset.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Sooners once owned the Big 12, but they slumped in their closing three seasons, failing to even make the championship game at a time when the league has been down. Stunningly, OU hasn't produced a first-team All-American since 2019. That hardly represents positive momentum for a shift into the country's dominant conference.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Temple
Sept. 7	Houston
Sept. 14	Tulane
Sept. 21	Tennessee
Sept. 28	at Auburn
Oct. 12	vs. Texas #
Oct. 19	South Carolina
Oct. 26	at Ole Miss
Nov. 2	Maine
Nov. 9	at Missouri
Nov. 23	Alabama
Nov. 30	at LSU

#Dallas, TX

2023 RESULTS (10-3, 7-2 BIG 12)

Sept. 2	Arkansas State	W	73-0
Sept. 9	SMU	W	28-11
Sept. 16	at Tulsa	W	66-17
Sept. 23	at Cincinnati	W	20-6
Sept. 30	Iowa State	W	50-20
Oct. 7	vs. Texas #	W	34-30
Oct. 21	UCF	W	31-29
Oct. 28	at Kansas	L	33-38
Nov. 4	at Oklahoma State	L	24-27
Nov. 11	West Virginia	W	59-20
Nov. 18	at BYU	W	31-24
Nov. 24	TCU	W	69-45
Dec. 28	vs. Arizona %	L	24-38

#Dallas %Alamo Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	David Stone, DL	★★★★★
2.	Taylor Tatum, RB	★★★★
3.	Danny Okoye, EDGE	★★★★
4.	Reggie Powers, S	★★★★
5.	Zion Kearney, WR	★★★★
6.	Eugene Brooks, OL	★★★★
7.	Davon Mitchell, TE	★★★★
8.	Michael Hawkins, QB	★★★★
9.	Ivan Carreon, WR	★★★★
10.	Nigel Smith II, DL	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Brent Venables • Record at School: 16-10 (2 years) • Career Record: 16-10 (2 years)
Offensive Coordinators: Seth Littrell, Joe Jon Finley • Defensive Coordinators: Zac Alley, Todd Bates
Location: Norman, Okla. • Stadium: Gaylord Family - Oklahoma Memorial Stadium (83,489)

OLE MISS REBELS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 5 | SEC PREDICTION: 3 |
2023 RECORD: 11-2, 6-2 SEC

OFFENSE The defending Peach Bowl champions received a major boost on New Year's Day when quarterback Jaxson Dart announced he would be returning to Oxford for his senior season. The USC transfer has been the Rebels' starter the last two seasons and was among the most efficient passers in the country in 2023, throwing for 3,364 yards, 23 touchdowns and just five interceptions with another eight touchdowns on the ground.

He returns three premier receiving options in receivers Tre Harris and Jordan Watkins and tight end Caden Prieskorn, who had a combined 2,175 receiving yards and 15 TDs in 2023. The Rebels also added former All-SEC receiver Antwane Wells Jr. from South Carolina. All-SEC running back Quinshon Judkins transferred to Ohio State, leaving Ulysses Bentley IV (540 yards, four scores in '23) as the leading returning rusher.

Ole Miss returns three full-time starters on the offensive line and added several key pieces through the portal, including former Washington lineman Nate Kalepo, who started 15 games for the Huskies last year.

DEFENSE Following a 52-17 loss at Georgia, Rebels head coach Lane Kiffin acknowledged that his team needed to get bigger and stronger, particularly up front. The additions of Walter Nolen and Princely Umanmielen were a step in the right direction.

Nolen is a Texas A&M transfer and was one of the highest-rated players in the portal. Umanmielen was second-team All-SEC last season at Florida and led the Gators with seven sacks. Nolen, Umanmielen, former Alabama cornerback Trey Amos and former Arkansas linebacker Chris Paul Jr. were all ranked as top-50 players in the portal by 247Sports and should provide excitement to a defense already headed in the right direction under coordinator Pete Golding. The Rebels also return starting defensive linemen Jared Ivey and JJ Pegues and safety John Saunders Jr.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Caden Davis hit 18-of-23 field goals last season with a long of 56. Punter Fraser Masin will enter his third season as the team's punter, having averaged 42.3 yards per punt the last two years.

FINAL ANALYSIS The majority of Ole Miss' key contributors from last season decided to give it one more go in an attempt to reach an expanded CFP field in 2024. The Rebels added impact players through the transfer portal at nearly every level, too. Ole Miss is coming off its first 11-win season ever, and expectations are as high as they've ever been in Oxford. This team is talented, well-coached and battle-tested. The Rebels — at least on paper — have the makings of an SEC contender.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Furman
Sept. 7	Middle Tennessee
Sept. 14	at Wake Forest
Sept. 21	Georgia Southern
Sept. 28	Kentucky
Oct. 5	at South Carolina
Oct. 12	at LSU
Oct. 26	Oklahoma
Nov. 2	at Arkansas
Nov. 9	Georgia
Nov. 23	at Florida
Nov. 30	Mississippi St.

2023 RESULTS (11-2, 6-2 SEC)

Sept. 2	Mercer	W	73-7
Sept. 9	at Tulane	W	37-20
Sept. 16	Georgia Tech	W	48-23
Sept. 23	at Alabama	L	10-24
Sept. 30	LSU	W	55-49
Oct. 7	Arkansas	W	27-20
Oct. 21	at Auburn	W	28-21
Oct. 28	Vanderbilt	W	33-7
Nov. 4	Texas A&M	W	38-35
Nov. 11	at Georgia	L	17-52
Nov. 18	ULM	W	35-3
Nov. 23	at Mississippi St.	W	17-7
Dec. 30	vs. Penn State #	W	38-25

#Peach Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Deion Smith, WR	★★★★
2.	William Echoles, OL	★★★★
3.	Kam Franklin, DL	★★★★
4.	Travaris Banks, S	★★★★
5.	Katrevrick Banks, S	★★★★
6.	Raymond Collins, LB	★★★★
7.	Cedrick Beavers, CB	★★★★
8.	AJ Maddox, QB	★★★
9.	Kamron Beavers, DL	★★★
10.	Jeffery Rush, DL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Lane Kiffin • Record at School: 34-15 (4 years) • Career Record: 95-49 (11+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Charlie Weis Jr. • Defensive Coordinators: Pete Golding, Brian Brown • Location: Oxford, Miss. Stadium: Vaught-Hemingway Stadium (64,038)

Jaxson Dart

SCOUTING THE REBELS

"If they can make it to Atlanta and go to the Playoff, it will be the success story of the portal era. I think it takes a certain kind of personality to manage a portal culture on your roster, and Lane Kiffin has it where someone like a Jimbo Fisher does not. Offensively, they're absolutely stacked. Defensively, they're better year over year with [Pete] Golding coming in. The real change that NIL and the portal created for them is the front-seven talent. ... Are they Georgia? Are they Texas? Probably not. They don't have the kind of developmental system those elite programs have. The experiment they're running is: Can you rent one?"

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	9	**TRE HARRIS (SR.)**	1	Ayden Williams (So.)
WR	11	**JORDAN WATKINS (SR.)**	19	Cayden Lee (So.)
WR	3	Antwane Wells Jr. (Jr.)	81	Noreel White (Fr.)
LT	50	Jayden Williams (Jr.)	61	Diego Pounds (Jr.)
LG	71	Nate Kalepo (Sr.)	73	Eli Acker (Sr.)
C	54	**CALEB WARREN (SR.)**	56	Reece McIntyre (Sr.)
RG	78	**JEREMY JAMES (SR.)**	65	Gerquan Scott (Sr.)
RT	57	**MICAH PETTUS (JR.)**	52	Julius Buelow (Sr.)
TE	86	**CADEN PRIESKORN (SR.)**	8	Dae'Quan Wright (Jr.)
QB	2	**JAXSON DART (SR.)**	7	Walker Howard (So.)
RB	24	**ULYSSES BENTLEY IV (SR.)**		Jacory Croskey-Merritt (Sr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	15	**JARED IVEY (SR.)**	14	Cam Franklin (Fr.)
DT	2	Walter Nolen (Jr.)	96	Jamarious Brown (Fr.)
DT	89	**JJ PEGUES (SR.)**	51	**ZXAVIAN HARRIS (JR.)**
DE	1	Princely Umanmielen (Sr.)	95	Akelo Stone (Sr.)
LB	4	Suntarine Perkins (So.)	6	TJ Dudley (So.)
LB	11	Chris Paul Jr. (Jr.)	30	Trip White (So.)
LB	23	**KHARI COLEMAN (SR.)**	34	Tyler Banks (Jr.)
CB	9	Trey Amos (Sr.)	32	Chris Graves (So.)
CB	8	Brandon Turnage (Sr.)	32	Chris Graves (So.)
S	5	**JOHN SAUNDERS JR. (SR.)**	12	Key Lawrence (Sr.)
S	25	**TREY WASHINGTON (SR.)**	16	Yam Banks (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	41	Caden Davis (Sr.)	KR	24	Ulysses Bentley IV (Sr.)
P	12	Fraser Masin (Sr.)	PR	11	Jordan Watkins (Sr.)

Returning starters in ***BOLD***

Petre Thomas-USA TODAY Sports

Debo Williams

SCOUTING THE GAMECOCKS

"Shane [Beamer] is a great football guy overall, just a high-energy, passionate thinker. Can't say enough good about him. Last year was just the reality, hitting the wall. That's what it's like in this league when you're trying to maintain success at any program, but especially one that has to fight for everything in the shadow of the big boys. ... [Quarterback LaNorris] Sellers is going to be their starter, but the Auburn quarterback [Robby Ashford] could really push him. They're weak at receiver, so expect them to try to portal in someone there. ... The defense moved to a hybrid kind of 3-3 thing last season because they were getting smoked in the pass. I think they're going to keep the five-DB looks."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	8	Nyck Harbor (So.)	3	Mazeo Bennett (Fr.)
WR	14	Jared Brown (Jr.)	9	Luke Doty (Sr.)
WR	7	Gage Larvadain (Sr.)	1	Ahmari Huggins-Bruce (Sr.)
LT	51	**TREE BABALADE (SO.)**	50	Jatavius Shivers (Fr.)
LG	55	**JAKAI MOORE (SR.)**	58	Markee Anderson (Fr.)
C	76	Torricelli Simpkins III (Sr.)	71	Blake Franks (Fr.)
RG	78	**TROVON BAUGH (SO.)**	52	Kamaar Bell (Sr.)
RT	53	**VERSHON LEE (SR.)**	75	Cason Henry (So.)
TE	6	Joshua Simon (Sr.)	87	Brady Hunt (Jr.)
QB	16	LaNorris Sellers (Fr.)	4	Robby Ashford (Sr.)
RB	5	Rocket Sanders (Sr.)	27	Oscar Adaway III (Sr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	5	Kyle Kennard (Sr.)	46	Bryan Thomas Jr. (Jr.)
DT	95	**ALEX HUNTLEY (SR.)**	99	DeAndre Jules (Sr.)
DT	91	Tonka Hemingway (Fr.)	90	**T.J. SANDERS (JR.)**
DE	55	Gilber Edmond (Sr.)	12	Jatius Geer (Jr.)
LB	22	Bam Martin-Scott (Sr.)	14	Jaron Willis (So.)
LB	0	**DEBO WILLIAMS (SR.)**	17	Demetrius Knight Jr. (Sr.)
CB	20	Judge Collier (So.)	4	Vicari Swain (Fr.)
CB	3	**O'DONNELL FORTUNE (SR.)**	8	Emory Floyd (So.)
NB	24	**JALON KILGORE (SO.)**	23	Gerald Kilgore (So.)
SS	7	**NICK EMMANWORI (JR.)**	33	Buddy Mack III (Sr.)
FS	1	**DQ SMITH (JR.)**	29	David Spaulding (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

PK	40	Alex Herrera (Sr.)	KR	0	Juju McDowell (Sr.)
P	39	Kai Kroeger (Sr.)	PR	14	Jared Brown (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Nelson Chenault-USA TODAY Sports

SOUTH CAROLINA GAMECOCKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 40 | SEC PREDICTION: 13 | 2023 RECORD: 5-7, 3-5 SEC

OFFENSE South Carolina could not run the ball last season (a miserable 85.1 yards per game, last by far in the SEC), which made it all the more spectacular what quarterback Spencer Rattler did, throwing for more than 3,000 yards in one of the best seasons in school history.

He's off to the NFL, and USC swung big to fix its running problem by adding former Arkansas stud Raheim "Rocket" Sanders. But with no Rattler, the QB job will fall to redshirt freshman LaNorris Sellers, a dynamic athlete who flashed at times last year but will have to learn on the job. Former Auburn starter Robby Ashford was brought in to battle for the QB spot and supplies a valuable backup, but each will function behind a line that gave up 41 sacks. Offensive line injuries were one of the major storylines for the Gamecocks last year, but USC feels it can be effective if it doesn't have to replace a starter nearly every game.

The receivers are plentiful but small, with only one (the 6-foot-5 Nyck Harbor) above 6-foot-2. Harbor, a world-class sprinter, can separate but is still learning how to play receiver at the SEC level. Joshua Simon and Brady Hunt will be solid targets at tight end.

DEFENSE A November switch to a new base alignment (3-3-5 instead of 4-2-5) helped improve what was a rotten defense, but it still wasn't enough to reverse what became head coach Shane Beamer's first losing season. The secondary did not play to expectations, and the front, as it has for the past two seasons, struggled to stop the run.

Defensive coordinator Clayton White says the 3-3-5 will be a base, but USC will still go to his preferred 4-2-5, and the Gamecocks do have some talent returning. Linebacker Debo Williams returns after a fantastic season, while freshman edge rusher Dylan Stewart looks like every bit of the 5-star talent he was rated. The secondary has talent — Nick Emmanwori, DQ Smith and Jalon Kilgore have played at a high level in the past — but it can't have as rough a start as it did last year.

SPECIALISTS One of the most exciting units in the country under coordinator Pete Lembo is under new leadership, after Lembo departed to become head coach at Buffalo. Joe DeCamillis is on board after a lifetime in the NFL, and he will have punter Kai Kroeger to rely on, but he is breaking in a new kicker after the automatic Mitch Jeter transferred.

FINAL ANALYSIS Beamer charmed Columbia with two strong seasons to start his tenure, but last year was a severe step back, and now he has a new quarterback and a murderous schedule. Make a bowl game, and the future looks promising. Another losing season, and the pitchforks are sharpened.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Old Dominion
Sept. 7	at Kentucky
Sept. 14	LSU
Sept. 21	Akron
Oct. 5	Ole Miss
Oct. 12	at Alabama
Oct. 19	at Oklahoma
Nov. 2	Texas A&M
Nov. 9	at Vanderbilt
Nov. 16	Missouri
Nov. 23	Wofford
Nov. 30	at Clemson

2023 RESULTS (5-7, 3-5 SEC)

Sept. 2	vs. North Carolina #	L	17-31
Sept. 9	Furman	W	47-21
Sept. 16	at Georgia	L	14-24
Sept. 23	Mississippi State	W	37-30
Sept. 30	at Tennessee	L	20-41
Oct. 14	Florida	L	39-41
Oct. 21	at Missouri	L	12-34
Oct. 28	at Texas A&M	L	17-30
Nov. 4	Jacksonville State	W	38-28
Nov. 11	Vanderbilt	W	47-6
Nov. 18	Kentucky	W	17-14
Nov. 25	Clemson	L	7-16

#Charlotte

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dylan Stewart, EDGE	★★★★★
2.	Josiah Thompson, OT	★★★★★
3.	Mathew Fuller, RB	★★★★
4.	Michael Smith, TE	★★★★
5.	Fred Johnson, LB	★★★★
6.	Wendell Gregory, EDGE	★★★★
7.	Mazeo Bennett, WR	★★★★
8.	Kelvin Hunter, S	★★★★
9.	Jalewis Solomon, ATH	★★★
10.	Kam Pringle, OT	★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Shane Beamer • Record at School: 20-18 (3 years) • Career Record: 20-18 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Dowell Loggains • Defensive Coordinator: Clayton White • Location: Columbia, S.C. Stadium: Williams-Brice Stadium (77,559)

TENNESSEE VOLUNTEERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 13 | SEC PREDICTION: 7 | 2023 RECORD: 9-4, 4-4 SEC

OFFENSE It's Nico Iamaleava time in Tennessee. The former 5-star quarterback is taking the reins of head coach Josh Heupel's high-powered offense. Iamaleava, a redshirt freshman, flashed in four games then performed well in the Citrus Bowl against Iowa. He injects life into the offense after a frustrating season with Joe Milton III at the helm.

Bru McCoy returns after a season-ending injury to lead the wide receiver corps. Squirrel White needs to make a jump, as does former Oregon transfer Dont'e Thornton Jr. Freshmen Mike Matthews and Braylon Staley are good additions. Tulane transfer Chris Brazzell II could elevate the passing attack, as could Notre Dame transfer tight end Holden Staes.

The offensive line returns three starters, but the key is left tackle Lance Heard, a former 5-star recruit who transferred from LSU after his freshman season. Tennessee ran the ball extremely well last season. Dylan Sampson (604 yards, seven TDs) is the leading returning rusher and will be the main back, but the group lacks proven depth.

DEFENSE Tennessee's defense features one of the game's most dominant forces in edge rusher James Pearce Jr., a likely top-10 NFL Draft pick in 2025 after a sophomore season with 14.5 tackles for a loss and 10 sacks.

It isn't just Pearce for the Vols, though. Tennessee led the SEC in tackles for a loss with 101 and was second in sacks with 41 last season. The defensive line is the unquestioned strength of the unit — but that group and the defense as a whole must perform better against elite competition.

The Vols lost 10 defensive backs this offseason, including seven to the transfer portal and three to the NFL Draft. There will be plenty of new faces, including some transfers — cornerback Jermod McCoy (Oregon State), cornerback Jalen McMurray (Temple) and safety Jakobe Thomas (Middle Tennessee). Remember the name Boo Carter. He can play safety or nickelback and could do so early in his career.

SPECIALISTS Josh Turbyville will be the placekicker after Charles Campbell's graduation. Jackson Ross returns at punter and can boot it with either foot. Tennessee loses a weapon in punt returner Dee Williams, but the Vols hope White, Carter and Cameron Seldon can be forces on returns.

FINAL ANALYSIS Tennessee's historic 2022 offense dipped in 2023. There's reason to believe that it will snap back into elite form in 2024 with Iamaleava running the show. The defensive line has star power. The secondary and offensive skill positions will dictate the ceiling, as Tennessee has the pieces to compete for a College Football Playoff spot.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Chattanooga
Sept. 7	vs. NC State #
Sept. 14	Kent State
Sept. 21	at Oklahoma
Oct. 5	at Arkansas
Oct. 12	Florida
Oct. 19	Alabama
Nov. 2	Kentucky
Nov. 9	Mississippi St.
Nov. 16	at Georgia
Nov. 23	UTEP
Nov. 30	at Vanderbilt

#Charlotte, NC

2023 RESULTS (9-4, 4-4 SEC)

Sept. 2	vs. Virginia #	W	49-13
Sept. 9	Austin Peay	W	30-13
Sept. 16	at Florida	L	16-29
Sept. 23	UTSA	W	45-14
Sept. 30	South Carolina	W	41-20
Oct. 14	Texas A&M	W	20-13
Oct. 21	at Alabama	L	20-34
Oct. 28	at Kentucky	W	33-27
Nov. 4	Connecticut	W	59-3
Nov. 11	at Missouri	L	7-36
Nov. 18	Georgia	L	10-38
Nov. 25	Vanderbilt	W	48-24
Jan. 1	vs. Iowa %	W	35-0

#Nashville %Citrus Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jordan Ross, EDGE	★★★★★
2.	Mike Matthews, WR	★★★★
3.	Peyton Lewis, RB	★★★★
4.	Braylon Staley, WR	★★★★
5.	Kaleb Beasley, CB	★★★★
6.	Boo Carter, ATH	★★★★
7.	Kellen Lindstrom, EDGE	★★★★
8.	Bennett Warren, OT	★★★★
9.	Jeremias Heard, DL	★★★★
10.	Jake Merklinger, QB	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Josh Heupel • Record at School: 27-12 (3 years) • Career Record: 55-20 (6 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Joey Halzle • Defensive Coordinator: Tim Banks • Location: Knoxville, Tenn.
Stadium: Neyland Stadium (101,915)

Nico Iamaleava

SCOUTING THE VOLUNTEERS

"That staff thinks Nico [Iamaleava] will be the best quarterback they've had in that system, and when they have a QB they're confident in, they're as good as anyone on that side of the football. The question is going to be what they put around him this season; they don't have an elite wideout or obvious target, but the Tulane transfer [Chris Brazzell II] is pretty decent. ... Defensively, they're not at the level of the national title-caliber programs in this league, but they're better than when Josh [Heupel] took over. The floor is higher here, but they have question marks in the secondary. ... Put them right outside of the playoff contenders for now, but the quarterback could be really special."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	15	**BRU MCCOY (SR.)**	1	Dont'e Thornton Jr. (Sr.)
WR	10	**SQUIRREL WHITE (JR.)**	89	Mike Matthews (Fr.)
WR	11	Chris Brazzell II (So.)	84	Kaleb Webb (So.)
LT	53	Lance Heard (So.)	66	Dayne Davis (Sr.)
LG	70	Andrej Karic (Sr.)	79	Shamurad Umarov (Fr.)
C	63	**COOPER MAYS (SR.)**	51	Vysen Lang (Fr.)
RG	76	**JAVONTEZ SPRAGGINS (SR.)**	68	Masai Reddick (So.)
RT	74	**JOHN CAMPBELL JR. (SR.)**	67	Trevor Duncan (Fr.)
TE	19	Holden Staes (Jr.)	86	Ethan Davis (Fr.)
QB	8	Nico Iamaleava (Fr.)	13	Gaston Moore (Sr.)
RB	6	Dylan Sampson (Jr.)	23	Cameron Seldon (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	42	Tyre West (Jr.)	90	Dominic Bailey (Sr.)
NT	21	**OMARI THOMAS (SR.)**	10	Elijah Simmons (Sr.)
DT	20	**BRYSON EASON (SR.)**	55	Omarr Norman-Lott (Sr.)
DE	27	**JAMES PEARCE JR. (JR.)**	19	Joshua Josephs (Jr.)
LB	7	Arion Carter (So.)	22	Jeremiah Telander (So.)
LB	11	Keenan Pili (Sr.)	40	Kalib Perry (Jr.)
CB	13	Jermod McCoy (So.)	15	Cristian Conyer (Jr.)
CB	18	Rickey Gibson III (So.)	12	Jalen McMurray (Jr.)
STAR	25	Jourdan Thomas (Jr.)	23	Boo Carter (Fr.)
S	17	Andre Turrentine (Jr.)	35	Will Brooks (Sr.)
S	30	Jakobe Thomas (Jr.)	33	John Slaughter (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	94	Josh Turbyville (So.)	KR	23	Cameron Seldon (So.)
P	98	Jackson Ross (So.)	PR	10	Squirrel White (Jr.)

Returning starters in ***BOLD***

Morgan Tencza-USA TODAY Sports

Quinn Ewers

SCOUTING THE LONGHORNS

"I think there's a tendency to look at the league expansion from the point of view of the new programs having to acclimate to the league, but this might be the other way around. You can't compare Texas or OU to those A&M and Mizzou programs that came in. They're gonna pair the Bama receiver transfer [Isaiah Bond] with their other 5-stars and probably won't miss much at this position. ... If you're looking for a weak spot, maybe it's the fact you have the most famous name in quarterback history [Arch Manning] as a backup? But that's a problem any staff would take. They instantly compare to the top programs in the league in terms of depth and talent and could definitely win the conference and be headed back to the playoff."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	7	Isaiah Bond (Jr.)	1	Johntay Cook II (So.)
WR	0	DeAndre Moore Jr. (So.)		Silas Bolden (Sr.)
WR	2	Matthew Golden (Jr.)	5	Ryan Wingo (Fr.)
LT	78	**KELVIN BANKS JR. (JR.)**	74	Trevor Goosby (Fr.)
LG	76	**HAYDEN CONNER (SR.)**	72	Neto Umeozulu (So.)
C	65	**JAKE MAJORS (SR.)**	54	Cole Hutson (Jr.)
RG	52	**DJ CAMPBELL (JR.)**	79	Connor Stroh (Fr.)
RT	56	Cameron Williams (Jr.)	73	Brandon Baker (Fr.)
TE	85	Gunnar Helm (Sr.)	8	Amari Niblack (Jr.)
QB	3	**QUINN EWERS (JR.)**	16	Arch Manning (Fr.)
RB	23	Jaydon Blue (Jr.)	4	CJ Baxter (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

JACK	88	**BARRYN SORRELL (SR.)**	11	Colin Simmons (Fr.)
NT	45	Vernon Broughton (Sr.)	98	Tiaoalii Savea (Sr.)
DT	95	Alfred Collins (Sr.)	94	Jaray Bledsoe (So.)
BUCK	91	**ETHAN BURKE (SO.)**	31	Trey Moore (Jr.)
MLB	0	Anthony Hill Jr. (So.)	18	Liona Lefau (So.)
WLB	33	**DAVID GBENDA (SR.)**	37	Morice Blackwell Jr. (Jr.)
CB	5	Malik Muhammad (So.)	24	Warren Roberson (Fr.)
CB	9	Gavin Holmes (Sr.)	4	Austin Jordan (Jr.)
NB	7	**JAHDAE BARRON (SR.)**	3	Jaylon Guilbeau (So.)
S	2	Derek Williams Jr. (So.)	25	Jelani McDonald (So.)
S	13	Andrew Mukuba (Sr.)	16	**MICHAEL TAAFFE (JR.)**

SPECIALISTS

K	45	Bert Auburn (Jr.)	PR	1 Johntay Cook (So.)
P		Michael Kern (Fr.)	KR	26 Quintrevion Wisner (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Kevin Jairaj-USA TODAY Sports

TEXAS LONGHORNS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 4 | SEC PREDICTION: 2 | 2023 RECORD: 12-2, 8-1 BIG 12

OFFENSE When Quinn Ewers announced that he was returning to Texas for a third season despite losing leading pass-catchers Xavier Worthy, Adonai Mitchell, Jordan Whittington and first-team All-Big 12 tight end Ja'Tavion Sanders and 1,000-yard rusher Jonathon Brooks to the NFL Draft, you figured portal help was likely on the way. Meet portal receivers Isaiah Bond of Alabama, Matthew Golden of Houston, Silas Bolden of Oregon State and tight end Amari Niblack of Alabama.

Head coach Steve Sarkisian is adding that portal skill talent to an offense returning four starters on the line, including first-team All-Big 12 junior left tackle Kelvin Banks Jr.; a pair of rising star running backs in junior Jaydon Blue (6.1 ypc in 2023) and sophomore CJ Baxter (4.8 ypc in 2023); and senior tight ends Gunnar Helm and Juan Davis.

With Ewers, a Heisman Trophy favorite, and sophomore backup Arch Manning at quarterback, Sarkisian is simply reloading a unit that averaged 35.8 points per game in reaching the College Football Playoff in 2023.

DEFENSE It might be too much to expect Texas' defense to maintain its No. 3 FBS ranking against the run in 2023 (82.4 ypg) after losing 2023 Outland Award winner T'Vondre Sweat, Big 12 Defensive Lineman of the Year Byron Murphy and two-time first-team All-Big 12 middle linebacker Jaylan Ford — all to the NFL Draft.

But Texas has a lot of returning talent, including second-leading tackler Anthony Hill Jr., a freshman All-American in 2023 who is expected to move from weakside to middle linebacker. Sophomore Malik Muhammad is a rising star at cornerback.

The Longhorns also brought in portal help at defensive tackle (senior Tiaoalii Savea of Arizona), at safety (senior Andrew Mukuba of Clemson), at edge rusher (junior Trey Moore, who had 14 sacks for UTSA in 2023) and at linebacker (senior Kendrick Blackshire of Alabama).

SPECIALISTS Kicker Bert Auburn hit 20 of his last 21 field goal attempts in 2023 and returns as the starter in 2024. Texas will attempt to replace Stanford transfer punter Ryan Sanborn (45.7 yards per punt in 2023) with true freshman Michael Kern. The Longhorns have a lot of speed options in the return game, including Bond, Golden and Johntay Cook II.

FINAL ANALYSIS If Texas' offense has reloaded successfully with portal pass-catchers, and if the defense can develop a solid rotation of interior linemen, the Longhorns have a chance to contend in Year 1 in the SEC with the goal of reaching the 12-team College Football Playoff. Playing at Michigan on Sept. 7 will be an early barometer.

2023 RESULTS (12-2, 8-1 BIG 12)

Sept. 2	Rice	W	37-10
Sept. 9	at Alabama	W	34-24
Sept. 16	Wyoming	W	31-10
Sept. 23	at Baylor	W	38-6
Sept. 30	Kansas	W	40-14
Oct. 7	vs. Oklahoma #	L	30-34
Oct. 21	at Houston	W	31-24
Oct. 28	BYU	W	35-6
Nov. 4	Kansas State (ot)	W	33-30
Nov. 11	at TCU	W	29-26
Nov. 18	at Iowa State	W	26-16
Nov. 24	Texas Tech	W	57-7
Dec. 2	vs. OK State %	W	49-21
Jan. 1	vs. Washington &	L	31-37

#Dallas %Arlington
&Sugar Bowl: CFB Playoff Semifinal

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Colorado State
Sept. 7	at Michigan
Sept. 14	UTSA
Sept. 21	ULM
Sept. 28	Mississippi St.
Oct. 12	vs. Oklahoma #
Oct. 19	Georgia
Oct. 26	at Vanderbilt
Nov. 9	Florida
Nov. 16	at Arkansas
Nov. 23	Kentucky
Nov. 30	at Texas A&M

#Dallas, TX

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Colin Simmons, EDGE	★★★★★
2.	Brandon Baker, OT	★★★★
3.	Xavier Filsaime, S	★★★★
4.	Kobe Black, CB	★★★★
5.	Ryan Wingo, WR	★★★★
6.	Zina Umeozulu, EDGE	★★★★
7.	Wardell Mack, CB	★★★★
8.	Santana Wilson, CB	★★★★
9.	Jordan Washington, TE	★★★★
10.	Trey Owens, QB	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Steve Sarkisian • Record at School: 25-14 (3 years) Career Record: 71-49 (9+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Kyle Flood Defensive Coordinator: Pete Kwiatkowski • Location: Austin, Texas Stadium: Darrell K Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium (100,119)

TEXAS A&M AGGIES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 18 | SEC PREDICTION: 9 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 4-4 SEC

OFFENSE Injuries forced Texas A&M to change quarterbacks seven times over the past two seasons. Improving the offense starts with better protection. Last season, quarterback Conner Weigman was off to a fast start with 979 passing yards and eight touchdowns in three and a half games. But a missed blocking assignment led to his season-ending injury.

Bolstering the offensive line is a priority for first-year head coach Mike Elko, who comes to A&M from Duke. Three starters return up front, but only tackle Trey Zuhn III may be assured a starting role. Kansas transfer Ar'maj Reed-Adams could unseat an incumbent.

Weigman will throw to a solid group of receivers. Wideout Moose Muhammad III has been productive as a backup. Now he moves into the starting lineup with Noah Thomas and Jahdae Walker. The Aggies are also in good shape at tight end with Donovan Green returning from injury and the arrival of Fresno State transfer Tre Watson.

A consistent threat needs to emerge at running back. Sophomore Rueben Owens is a good bet to fill that role.

DEFENSE The line again projects as an area of strength with the addition of Purdue transfer Nic Scourton, who led the Big Ten in sacks last season. He'll fit nicely with tackles Shemar Turner — who put the NFL Draft on hold — and DJ Hicks and end Shemar Stewart.

The biggest question facing the defense is how to replace All-America linebacker Edgerrin Cooper. The answer starts with the return of Freshman All-American Taurean York. Transfer Scooby Williams (Florida) adds punch there.

Safety Bryce Anderson is a rising star. Cornerback, though, has been a problem. The return of fourth-year starter Tyreek Chappel and the addition of Kansas State transfer Will Lee III could be the solution.

SPECIALISTS Special teams were dreadful in 2023. More consistency is needed from kicker Randy Bond, who converted 74.3 percent of field-goal attempts. A successor must emerge for punter Nic Constantinou. Ainias Smith was a threat on returns; replacing his production won't be easy.

FINAL ANALYSIS A&M has managed just 12 victories the past two seasons. Elko's presence, along with the scheme of new offensive coordinator Collin Klein, raises optimism for improvement. A&M caught a scheduling break with Notre Dame, LSU and Texas all coming to Kyle Field. In a best-case scenario, the Aggies could emerge as championship contenders. A nine-win season is a more realistic goal, and 8-4 is even more likely.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Notre Dame
Sept. 7	McNeese State
Sept. 14	at Florida
Sept. 21	Bowling Green
Sept. 28	vs. Arkansas #
Oct. 5	Missouri
Oct. 19	at Mississippi St.
Oct. 26	LSU
Nov. 2	at South Carolina
Nov. 16	New Mexico St.
Nov. 23	at Auburn
Nov. 30	Texas

#Arlington, TX

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 4-4 SEC)

Sept. 2	New Mexico	W	52-10
Sept. 9	at Miami	L	33-48
Sept. 16	ULM	W	47-3
Sept. 23	Auburn	W	27-10
Sept. 30	vs. Arkansas #	W	34-22
Oct. 7	Alabama	L	20-26
Oct. 14	at Tennessee	L	13-20
Oct. 28	South Carolina	W	30-17
Nov. 4	at Ole Miss	L	35-38
Nov. 11	Mississippi State	W	51-10
Nov. 18	Abilene Christian	W	38-10
Nov. 25	at LSU	L	30-42
Dec. 27	vs. Oklahoma St. %	L	23-31

#Arlington %Texas Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Terry Bussey, ATH	★★★★★
2.	Miles O'Neill, QB	★★★★
3.	Robert Bourdon, OT	★★★★
4.	Myles Davis, S	★★★★
5.	Blake Ivy, OL	★★★★
6.	Solomon Williams, EDGE	★★★★
7.	Izaiah Williams, WR	★★★★
8.	Eric Karner, TE	★★★★
9.	Dealyn Evans, DL	★★★★
10.	Isendre Ahfua, OL	★★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Elko • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 16-9 (2 seasons)
Offensive Coordinator: Collin Klein • Defensive Coordinator: Jay Bateman • Location: College Station, Texas
Stadium: Kyle Field (102,733)

Conner Weigman

SCOUTING THE AGGIES

"Mike [Elko] was a fantastic hire. He has a ton of respect in this league and across the industry, he knows the program firsthand and he's not going to worry about anything other than finding ways to win. It's going to be a night and day culture change at the head-coaching position. ... There's a lot of turnover coming from Jimbo Fisher's NIL mercenary-type culture to what Elko wants. Marcel Reed might be a better overall QB than Conner Weigman; don't be shocked if he's the starter at some point this season by beating him out or by injury. ... They could be really scary on defense. That's not going to be a first-year head coach situation. Elko knows the personnel, and they're really talented. The program has a chance to shift its entire identity this season to hard-nosed, defensive-minded, all that stuff, which can really fit that place. They could be a hell of a place to play."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	7	Moose Muhammad III (Sr.)	6	Cyrus Allen (Jr.)
WR	9	**JAHDAE WALKER (SR.)**	6	Cyrus Allen (Jr.)
WR	3	**NOAH THOMAS (JR.)**	4	Micah Tease (So.)
LT	60	**TREY ZUHN III (JR.)**	76	Reuben Fatheree II (Sr.)
LG	70	Ar'maj Reed-Adams (Jr.)	54	Mark Nabou Jr. (So.)
C	54	**MARK NABOU JR. (SO.)**		Kolinu'u Faaiu (Sr.)
RG	75	Kam Dewberry (Jr.)	71	**CHASE BISONTIS (SO.)**
RT	78	Dametrious Crownover (Jr.)	55	Hunter Erb (So.)
TE	18	Donovan Green (So.)	84	Tre Watson (Sr.)
QB	15	**CONNER WEIGMAN (SO.)**	13	Jaylen Henderson (Jr.)
RB	2	Rueben Owens (So.)	8	Le'Veon Moss (Jr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	11	Nic Scourton (Jr.)	92	Malick Sylla (Jr.)
DT	5	**SHEMAR TURNER (SR.)**	17	Albert Regis (Jr.)
DT	13	DJ Hicks (So.)	99	Gabriel Brownlow-Dindy (So.)
DE	4	Shemar Stewart (Jr.)	15	Rylan Kennedy (So.)
LB	21	**TAUREAN YORK (SO.)**	23	Chantz Johnson (So.)
LB	0	Scooby Williams (Jr.)		Solomon DeShields (Jr.)
NB	8	Jaydon Hill (Sr.)	18	Marcus Ratcliffe (So.)
CB	7	**TYREEK CHAPPELL (SR.)**	19	Bravion Rogers (So.)
CB	26	Will Lee III (Jr.)	10	Dezz Ricks (Fr.)
SS	25	Dalton Brooks (So.)	33	Jarred Kerr (Jr.)
FS	1	**BRYCE ANDERSON (JR.)**	29	Myles Davis (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	47	Randy Bond (Sr.)	KR	2	Rueben Owens (So.)
P	37	Tyler White (Fr.)	PR	7	Moose Muhammad III (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Maria Lysaker-USA TODAY Sports

Langston Patterson

SCOUTING THE COMMODORES

"A lot of people thought the university would have a really, really long leash with [Clark] Lea, but that might not be the case. They're marginally better than when this staff started, and if not for a few upsets two seasons ago, it looks even worse. There aren't clear expectations at Vandy, but they've got to be more competitive. The portal era has hit programs like these really hard. ... Bringing in [Tim] Beck and the NMSU QB [Diego Pavia] is interesting, but they've had really bad OL play, so it may not matter. Clark is calling the defense again, and he's a great DC, but it's all about personnel in this league. You aren't out-scheming anyone. They've got to find a way to find, keep and develop more talent, or they're not going to get back to .500."

— An opposing SEC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	3	Quincy Skinner Jr. (Sr.)	15	Richie Hoskins (Sr.)
WR	85	Junior Sherrill (So.)		Tristen Brown (Fr.)
WR		Loic Fouonji (Sr.)	84	Jeremiah Dillon (Jr.)
LT	55	**GUNNAR HANSEN (SR.)**	66	Anthony Miles (So.)
LG	76	Grayson Morgan (Jr.)	52	Kevo Wesley (Sr.)
C	74	Steven Losoya (Sr.)		Cade McConnell (Jr.)
RG		Steven Hubbard (Sr.)	71	**GAGE PITCHFORD (SR.)**
RT	75	Misael Sandoval (So.)	70	David Siegel (Jr.)
TE	16	Cole Spence (Jr.)	48	Kamrean Johnson (So.)
QB		Diego Pavia (Sr.)	17	Nate Johnson (Jr.)
RB	28	**SEDRICK ALEXANDER (SO.)**	46	AJ Newberry (So.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	96	Khordae Sydnor (Sr.)	97	Zaylin Wood (Sr.)
NT	5	Yilanan Ouattara (Jr.)	98	De'Marion Thomas (So.)
DT	99	Devin Lee (Sr.)	91	Christian James (Sr.)
EDGE	29	Miles Capers (Sr.)	0	**AENEAS DICOSMO (SR.)**
ILB	10	Langston Patterson (Jr.)	54	Bryan Longwell (So.)
ILB	20	Prince Kollie (Sr.)	22	Bryce Cowan (Jr.)
OLB/S	14	Randon Fontenette (So.)	12	Jeffrey Ugochukwu (Jr.)
CB		Marlon Jones Jr. (Sr.)	23	Kolbey Taylor (Jr.)
CB	25	Martel Hight (So.)	8	**TYSON RUSSELL (SR.)**
SS	1	**CJ TAYLOR (SR.)**	7	Marlen Sewell (Sr.)
FS	21	Dontae Carter (Fr.)	17	Jalen Gilbert (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	88	Brock Taylor (So.)	KR	Tristen Brown (Fr.)
P	29	Jesse Mirco (Sr.)	PR 25	Martel Hight (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Randy Sartin-USA TODAY Sports

VANDERBILT COMMODORES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 80 | SEC PREDICTION: 16 | 2023 RECORD: 2-10, 0-8 SEC

OFFENSE After Vanderbilt massively underachieved on offense in 2023, head coach Clark Lea fired former coordinator Joey Lynch and brought in New Mexico State's Tim Beck to revamp the unit. The result will be a highly unusual scheme for the FBS level.

Transfer quarterbacks Nate Johnson and Diego Pavia will battle for the chance to lead an option-heavy attack as the Commodores try to revive their run game (3.3 yards per carry in 2023). In part with the goal of juicing that rushing attack, Vanderbilt will rotate its tackles and guards by denoting a "strong-side" and "weak-side" combination so that it can run behind its best duo regardless of where the ball is on the field. Theoretically, this could also leave Vandy's less athletic tackles less exposed in pass protection. This approach is nearly unheard-of in modern college football.

Vanderbilt lost its top four receivers to the NCAA transfer portal. Beck will need to get more out of the Commodores' tight ends, led by the talented but oft-injured Cole Spence.

If Vandy can coax improved play out of its offensive line, then its funky offense could irritate opponents. If not, it will be another long season.

DEFENSE Lea, the former defensive coordinator at Notre Dame, will take over this unit in addition to his duties as head coach. Vanderbilt has improved its talent level and experience, suggesting that improved coaching could yield a quality unit for the first time in Lea's tenure.

A nonexistent pass rush and timid cornerback play have combined to make Vanderbilt's pass defense a nightmare over the past three years (109th in yards per attempt allowed in 2023). An increased emphasis on the transfer portal, however, could help there. Cornerbacks Marlon Jones Jr. and Kolbey Taylor figure to play major snaps, as will defensive linemen Khordae Sydnor and Zaylin Wood.

Middle linebacker Langston Patterson and safety CJ Taylor starred last season and will return, this time with more depth and talent around them. TCU transfer linebacker/safety Randon Fontenette and true freshman safety Dontae Carter bring the type of coverage skills that the Commodores have lacked in the past, allowing Lea to be more aggressive.

SPECIALISTS Ohio State transfer Jesse Mirco gives Vanderbilt a rock-solid punter, but kicking could be a concern with sophomore Brock Taylor never having attempted a field goal or extra point at the college level.

FINAL ANALYSIS Lea made necessary changes by ousting much of his coaching staff, overhauling schemes on both sides of the ball and bringing in experience from the transfer portal. Those decisions should position Vanderbilt better than in 2023, but a more difficult schedule means that bowl eligibility will be a stretch.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Virginia Tech
Sept. 7	Alcorn State
Sept. 14	at Georgia State
Sept. 21	at Missouri
Oct. 5	Alabama
Oct. 12	at Kentucky
Oct. 19	Ball State
Oct. 26	Texas
Nov. 2	at Auburn
Nov. 9	South Carolina
Nov. 23	at LSU
Nov. 30	Tennessee

2023 RESULTS (2-10, 0-8 SEC)

Aug. 26	Hawaii	W	35-28
Sept. 2	Alabama A&M	W	47-13
Sept. 9	at Wake Forest	L	20-36
Sept. 16	at UNLV	L	37-40
Sept. 23	Kentucky	L	28-45
Sept. 30	Missouri	L	21-38
Oct. 7	at Florida	L	14-38
Oct. 14	Georgia	L	20-37
Oct. 28	at Ole Miss	L	7-33
Nov. 4	Auburn	L	15-31
Nov. 11	at South Carolina	L	6-47
Nov. 25	at Tennessee	L	24-48

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Dontae Carter, S	★★★★
2.	Witt Edwards, TE	★★★★
3.	Jaylin Lackey, CB	★★★★
4.	Johann Cardenas, RB	★★★★
5.	Mason Carter, EDGE	★★★
6.	Joseph McVay, WR	★★★
7.	Brycen Coleman, TE	★★★
8.	Simeon Boulware, EDGE	★★★
9.	Markeis Barrett Jr., WR	★★★
10.	Jeremy St. Hilaire, QB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Clark Lea • Record at School: 9-27 (3 years) • Career Record: 9-27 (3 years) • Offensive Coordinator: Tim Beck • Defensive Coordinator: Clark Lea • Location: Nashville, Tenn. • Stadium: FirstBank Stadium (39,790)

SBC PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

EAST

1. **APPALACHIAN STATE** MOUNTAINEERS
2. **JAMES MADISON** DUKES
3. **MARSHALL** THUNDERING HERD
4. **COASTAL CAROLINA** CHANTICLEERS
5. **OLD DOMINION** MONARCHS
6. **GEORGIA SOUTHERN** EAGLES
7. **GEORGIA STATE** PANTHERS

WEST

1. **TEXAS STATE** BOBCATS
2. **ARKANSAS STATE** RED WOLVES
3. **LOUISIANA** RAGIN' CAJUNS
4. **SOUTH ALABAMA** JAGUARS
5. **TROY** TROJANS
6. **SOUTHERN MISS** GOLDEN EAGLES
7. **ULM** WARHAWKS

SUN BELT CHAMPIONSHIP

APPALACHIAN STATE OVER TEXAS STATE

ALL-SUN BELT TEAM

FIRST-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	Jordan McCloud	Texas State
RB	Jalen White	Georgia Southern
RB	Kanye Roberts	Appalachian State
AP	Ismail Mahdi	Texas State
WR	Joey Hobert	Texas State
WR	Kaedin Robinson	Appalachian State
WR	Courtney Jackson	Arkansas State
TE	Eli Wilson	Appalachian State
C	Jacob Bayer	Arkansas State
OL	Daniel King	Troy
OL	Makilan Thomas	Arkansas State
OL	AJ Gillie	Louisiana
OL	Logan Osburn	Marshall

FIRST-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	Ben Bell	Texas State
DL	Isaac Walker	Georgia Southern
DL	Wy'Kevious Thomas	South Alabama
DL	Denzel Lowry	Old Dominion
DL	Justin Rhodes	Georgia Southern
LB	Jason Henderson	Old Dominion
LB	Marques Watson-Trent	Georgia Southern
LB	Nate Johnson	Appalachian State
CB	Ethan Johnson	Appalachian State
CB	Gavin Pringle	Georgia State
S	Jaden Voisin	South Alabama
S	Jordan Favors	Appalachian State

FIRST-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	Mason Shipley	Texas State
P	Ryan Hanson	James Madison
KR	Ja'Quez Cross	Arkansas State
PR	Tiaquelin Mims	Southern Miss

AS For a look at second- and third-team selections, visit *AthlonSports.com*

BOWL PREDICTIONS

68 Ventures: Arkansas State vs. Toledo

Boca Raton: Appalachian State vs. UCF

Camellia: South Alabama vs. Bowling Green

Myrtle Beach: James Madison vs. Florida Atlantic

New Mexico: Texas State vs. UNLV

New Orleans: Louisiana vs. WKU

COACHING CAROUSEL

GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Offense: New: Ryan Aplin; Old: Bryan Ellis

GEORGIA STATE
Head Coach: New: Dell McGee; Old: Shawn Elliott
Offense: New: Jim Chaney; Old: Trent McKnight
Defense: New: Kevin Sherrer; Old: Chad Staggs

JAMES MADISON
Head Coach: New: Bob Chesney; Old: Curt Cignetti
Offense: New: Dean Kennedy; Old: Mike Shanahan
Defense: New: Lyle Hemphill; Old: Bryant Haines

LOUISIANA
Defense: New: Jim Salgado; Old: LaMar Morgan

MARSHALL
Offense: New: Seth Doege; Old: Clint Trickett

SOUTH ALABAMA
Head Coach: New: Major Applewhite; Old: Kane Wommack
Offense: New: Rob Ezell; Old: Major Applewhite
Defense: New: Will Windham; Old: Corey Batoon

SOUTHERN MISS
Offense: New: Chip Long; Old: Sam Gregg
Defense: New: Clay Bignell; Old: Dan O'Brien

TEXAS STATE
Defense: New: Dexter McCoil Sr., Bradley Dale Peveto; Old: Jonathan Patke

TROY
Head Coach: New: Gerad Parker; Old: Jon Sumrall
Offense: New: Sean Reagan; Old: Joe Craddock
Defense: New: Dontae Wright; Old: Greg Gasparato

ULM
Head Coach: New: Bryant Vincent; Old: Terry Bowden
Offense: New: Bryant Vincent; Old: Matt Kubik
Defense: New: Earnest Hill; Old: Vic Koenning

SUN BELT RETURNING LEADERS

PASSING	ATT	COMP	PCT	YDS	TD	INT	AVG/G
Jordan McCloud*, James Madison	412	281	68.2	3,657	35	10	281.3
Joey Aguilar, Appalachian St.	460	293	63.7	3,757	33	10	268.4
Jaylen Raynor, Arkansas St.	255	150	58.8	2,293	15	6	229.3

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Ismail Mahdi, Texas State	223	1,331	6.0	10	65	102.4
Ayo Adeyi*, North Texas	143	1,017	7.1	6	47	84.8
Jalen White, Georgia So.	160	889	5.6	9	45	80.8

RECEIVING	REC	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Joey Hobert, Texas State	76	896	11.8	8	83	81.4
Jamaal Pritchett, South Alabama	57	883	15.5	8	51	67.9
Kaedin Robinson, Appalachian St.	67	905	13.5	10	52	64.6

DEFENSE

TACKLES
Jason Henderson, ODU (170); Marques Watson-Trent, Georgia Southern (122)

SACKS
Ben Bell, Texas State (10.0); Cameron Whitfield, Louisiana (8.0)

INTERCEPTIONS
Gavin Pringle, Georgia State (4)

**McCloud transferred to Texas State in the offseason; *Adeyi transferred to James Madison in the offseason*

GAMES TO WATCH

SEPT. 28 Liberty at Appalachian State
SEPT. 28 Georgia Southern at Georgia State
OCT. 5 Appalachian State at Marshall
OCT. 10 Coastal Carolina at James Madison
OCT. 12 Arkansas State at Texas State
OCT. 12 Appalachian State at Louisiana
OCT. 15 Troy at South Alabama
OCT. 29 Louisiana at Texas State
NOV. 7 Appalachian State at Coastal Carolina
NOV. 9 Arkansas State at Louisiana
NOV. 23 James Madison at Appalachian State
NOV. 29 Texas State at South Alabama

RECRUITING RANKINGS BY SCHOOL

1. Troy (72)
2. Southern Miss (73)
3. South Alabama (75)
4. Coastal Carolina (81)
5. Arkansas State (82)
6. Texas State (87)
7. Georgia Southern (98)
8. Marshall (103)
9. Appalachian State (106)
10. James Madison (121)
11. ULM (123)
12. Georgia State (127)
13. Old Dominion (130)
14. Louisiana (133)

Rankings per On3; National ranking in parentheses

TOP 10 RECRUITS

	NAME	POS.	SCHOOL	RATING	NAT. RANK
1.	Jaden Hamlin	DL	ULM	★★★	15*
2.	Tray Taylor	WR	Coastal Carolina	★★★	27*
3.	Issiah Walker Jr.	OT	Texas State	★★★	31*
4.	Rahji Dennis	WR	Louisiana	★★★	724
5.	Derek Burns	Edge	Troy	★★★	40*
6.	Nasir Smith	DL	Georgia Southern	★★★	797
7.	Zeriah Beason	WR	Troy	★★★	48*
8.	Samari Collier	QB	Louisiana	★★★	52*
9.	Jaylen Boardley	ATH	Arkansas State	★★★	817
10.	Tyler Carter	Edge	South Alabama	★★★	864

**Junior college transfer/juco ranking*

APPALACHIAN STATE MOUNTAINEERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 39 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 1 | 2023 RECORD: 9-5, 6-2 SUN BELT

OFFENSE One of the more pleasant surprises in the G5 last season was the emergence of Appalachian State quarterback Joey Aguilar. Aguilar started the final 12 games of the season and earned the Sun Belt's Newcomer of the Year award after breaking App State's single-season records for passing touchdowns (33) and passing yardage (3,757). Aguilar is back in the saddle for his senior season for Shawn Clark's team.

Aguilar isn't the only veteran player in App State's offensive attack this year. Running backs Anderson Castle, Maquel Haywood and Kanye Roberts are all back this season. That trio combined for nearly 1,300 yards in 2023. They'll be running behind a well-coached offensive line. The App State community suffered an offseason tragedy with the passing of right tackle Jack Murphy, an All-Sun Belt selection last season.

DEFENSE Last season, the Mountaineers picked off a league-leading 15 passes and allowed the second-fewest passing yards per game (200.3) in the Sun Belt. Cornerback Ethan Johnson was a second-team All-Sun Belt selection after breaking up 11 passes and picking off one. Johnson is also a sure tackler, totaling 56 last season as a sophomore.

Speaking of young defensive talent, rising sophomore linebacker Nate Johnson is already one of App State's best defensive players. The South Carolina native led the team in both sacks (7.5) and tackles for a loss (8.5) last season. The 6-foot-5 outside linebacker is still developing as a player, too. They'll need him to help replace the production of departed leading tackler Andrew Parker Jr. In general, App State's younger front seven will need to grow up quickly and be ready for increased roles.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Michael Hughes returns after another stellar season in 2023 that included a 54-yard game-winning field goal at ULM. Hughes was named a second-team All-American by College Football Network last year. Punter Mitchell Lake also returns to Boone after averaging 39 yards per punt as a freshman in 2023.

FINAL ANALYSIS This is one of the more consistent programs in the G5, and it's hard to see many concrete reasons why App State shouldn't be one of the Sun Belt's better teams again. The strength of the offensive line will allow Aguilar and the running backs to control the ground game. Meanwhile, the defense should be decent again, although there is some room for improvement after the unit allowed five yards per rushing attempt last season.

2023 RESULTS (9-5, 6-2 SUN BELT)

Sept. 2	Gardner-Webb	W 45-24
Sept. 9	at N.Carolina (ot)	L 34-40
Sept. 16	East Carolina	W 43-28
Sept. 23	at Wyoming	L 19-22
Sept. 30	at ULM	W 41-40
Oct. 10	Coastal Carolina	L 24-27
Oct. 21	at Old Dominion	L 21-28
Oct. 28	Southern Miss	W 48-38
Nov. 4	Marshall	W 31-9
Nov. 11	at Georgia State	W 42-14
Nov. 18	at James Madison (ot)	W 26-23
Nov. 25	Georgia Southern	W 55-27
Dec. 2	at Troy #	L 23-49
Dec. 16	vs. Miami (Ohio) %	W 13-9

#SBC Championship %Cure Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	ETSU
Sept. 7	at Clemson
Sept. 14	at East Carolina
Sept. 19	South Alabama
Sept. 28	Liberty
Oct. 5	at Marshall
Oct. 12	at Louisiana
Oct. 26	Georgia State
Nov. 2	Old Dominion
Nov. 7	at Coastal Carolina
Nov. 23	James Madison
Nov. 30	at GA Southern

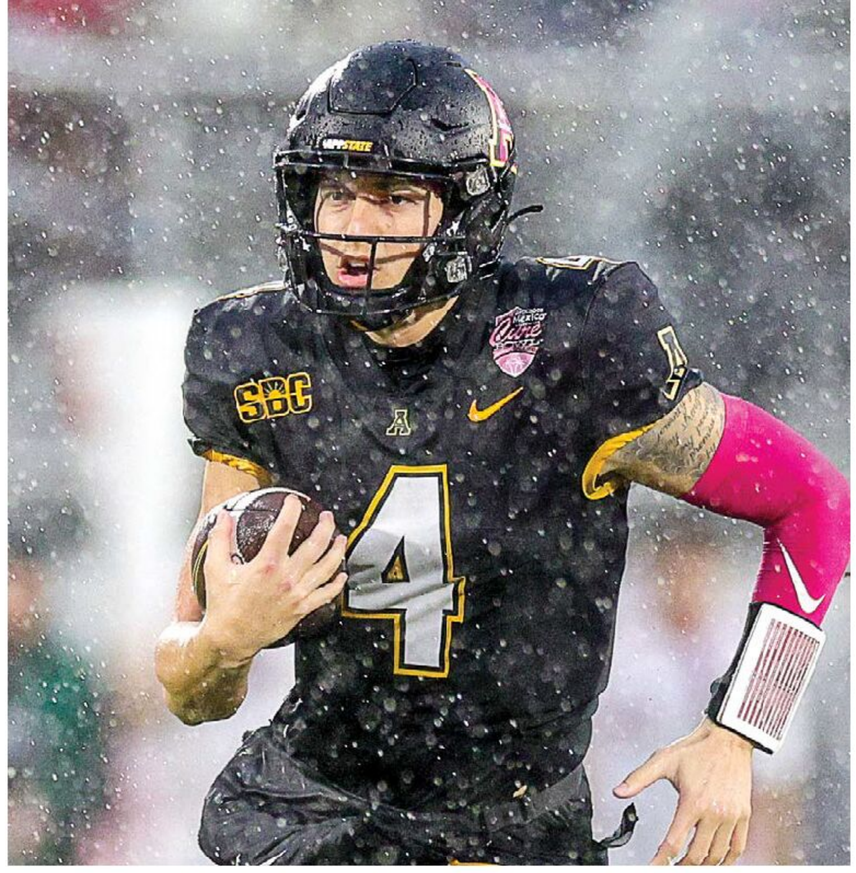
TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Khamani Alexander, RB ★★★
2. Talan Dudley, LB ★★★
3. DeNigel Cooper, EDGE ★★★
4. Jackson Bussey, EDGE ★★★
5. Anthony Rosier, EDGE ★★★
6. Bryce Gee, WR ★★★
7. Tyshawn Sanders, CB ★★★
8. Jose Leon, WR ★★★
9. Nick Taylor, S ★★★
10. Trey Lenhardt, S ★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Shawn Clark • Record at School: 35-18 (4+ years) Career Record: 35-18 (4+ years) • Offensive Coordinator: Frank Ponce • Defensive Coordinator: Scot Sloan • Location: Boone, N.C. Stadium: Kidd Brewer Stadium (30,000)



Joey Aguilar

SCOUTING THE MOUNTAINEERS

"Last offseason, they made a big shift in the assistant staff, and it paid off for them. They're back to playing that App State brand, and they're a conference title contender because of it. They have a standard at that program a lot of other schools in the league aspire to. The quarterback is really solid; they can build around him, and his receiving corps is largely intact. They're an attractive G5 destination for portal players, and they've done a good job using it. ... The defense has most everyone back. The O-line is probably their biggest question. With JMU and Troy rebuilding after the coaching changes, this is probably the best and most complete team in the league entering summer camps. They play Liberty, too, so if they can run the table, they would have a strong shot at the G5 playoff bid."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	13	**CHRISTIAN HORN (SR.)**	8	Dalton Stroman (Jr.)
WR	2	**KAEDIN ROBINSON (JR.)**	15	Makai Jackson (Jr.)
WR	12	Michael Hetzel (Jr.)		Blake Hoban (Jr.)
LT	70	**THORNTON GENTRY (JR.)**	72	Markell Samuel (Jr.)
LG		Thomas Shrader (Jr.)	70	Thornton Gentry (Jr.)
C		Michael Marotta (Jr.)	66	Danny Stevens (Fr.)
RG	74	Griffin Scroggs (So.)	66	Danny Stevens (Fr.)
RT	63	Jayden Ramsey (Jr.)	60	Ethan Ryan (Jr.)
TE	87	**ELI WILSON (SR.)**	85	David Larkins (Jr.)
QB	4	**JOEY AGUILAR (SR.)**		Charles Wright (So.)
RB	14	Kanye Roberts (So.)	1	Anderson Castle (Jr.)

DEFENSE (9)

DE	12	**SHAWN COLLINS (JR.)**	97	Kevin Abrams-Verwayne (Jr.)
DT	29	**SANTANA HOPPER (SO.)**	91	**MARKUS CLARK (JR.)**
DE	5	Michael Fletcher (Sr.)	96	Josiah Wyatt (So.)
OLB	90	**NATE JOHNSON (SO.)**	15	Thomas Davis (Jr.)
MLB	44	Brodrick Gooch (So.)	56	**KYLE ARNHOLT (JR.)**
OLB	26	**CADEN SULLIVAN (JR.)**	8	**BRENDAN HARRINGTON (SR.)**
CB		Seth Robertson (Sr.)	13	Trenton Alan Yowe (Jr.)
CB	19	**ETHAN JOHNSON (JR.)**		Jason Chambers (Jr.)
STAR		Avarion Cole (Jr.)	17	Jalik Thomas (Sr.)
S	11	**JORDAN FAVORS (JR.)**	37	Andre Hamilton (Jr.)
S		Myles Farmer (Sr.)	27	Ronald Clarke (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	99	Michael Hughes (Sr.)	KR 2	Kaedin Robinson (So.)
P	49	Mitchell Lake (So.)	PR 2	Kaedin Robinson (So.)

Returning starters in ***BOLD***

Nathan Ray Seebeck-USA TODAY Sports

Braydon Bennett

SCOUTING THE CHANTICLEERS

"There's not much left here from the [Jamey] Chadwell era, so it's really [Tim] Beck's program now. They have to replace a legendary quarterback run and rebuild their offense, so you could see a step back here this season. ... They haven't been active in NIL and lost a lot of guys they probably would've landed two years ago in recruiting. No one really knows the blueprint. With the previous staff, you knew their identity, you knew what they were building towards. This staff hasn't really established that yet. They're losing the last of the guys from that previous era. A lot of us think they're going to take a step back."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	82	**JAMESON TUCKER (JR.)**	88	Chase Smith (So.)
WR		Senika McKie (Sr.)	84	Bryson Graves (Fr.)
WR	83	Kyre Duplessis (Sr.)	11	De'Andre Coleman (So.)
LT	62	**NICK DEL GRANDE (SO.)**	68	Joseph Hanson (Fr.)
LG	57	**ZAC ELAM (SR.)**	73	Anthony Walton (Jr.)
C	58	Thomas Johnson (Jr.)	72	Evan Jumper (Sr.)
RG	65	Dillon Luther (Sr.)	67	Donavan Manson (Sr.)
RT	64	**ZOVON LINDSAY (SR.)**	78	Tyler Wagner (Sr.)
TE	85	**KENDALL KARR (SR.)**	81	Cane Berrong (Jr.)
QB	16	Ethan Vasko (So.)		Noah Kim (Jr.)
RB	1	Braydon Bennett (Jr.)	3	Max Balthazar (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	44	**WILL WHITSON (SR.)**	47	Clinton Anokwuru (Sr.)
DT	52	Allen Henry (Sr.)		Naejuan Barber (Jr.)
DT	91	Emmanuel Johnson (Sr.)	92	Demetrius Watson (Fr.)
DE	42	**BRAYLON RYAN (SR.)**	36	Joah Cash (Jr.)
ILB	55	Tray Brown (So.)	34	Wyatt Gedeon (Fr.)
OLB	1	**SHANE BRUCE (SR.)**	34	Wyatt Gedeon (Fr.)
CB	16	**MATTHEW MCDOOM (JR.)**	2	Courtney Eubanks (Sr.)
CB	5	Keontae Jenkins (Sr.)	12	Dre Pinckney (Jr.)
NB	0	**JUAN POWELL (SR.)**	9	Avyonne Jones (So.)
S	4	**TOBIAS FLETCHER (SR.)**	35	Eli Hillman (Jr.)
S		AJ Williams (Jr.)	19	Abraham Temoney III (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	25	Kade Hensley (Jr.)	KR	5 Ja'Vin Simpkins (Fr.)
P	95	Mack West (Jr.)	PR	16 Matthew McDoom (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

David Yeazell-USA TODAY Sports

COASTAL CAROLINA CHANTICLEERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 101 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 4 | 2023 RECORD: 8-5, 5-3 SUN BELT

OFFENSE If there's a word to describe Coastal Carolina football's 2023 season, it's probably "streaky." The Chanticleers opened with a loss at UCLA, then won two, lost two, won five, and then lost two before ending on a high note in the Hawaii Bowl. Each of their eight wins came when they scored at least 24 points. All in all, they'll need to finish more drives after scoring touchdowns on 26 of their 54 trips to the red zone

Kansas transfer quarterback Ethan Vasko got more chances to play as the season went on, throwing seven touchdown passes and just one interception in his final four appearances of the season. He'll be pushed for the starting job by Michigan State transfer Noah Kim, but Vasko proved to be efficient at running head coach Tim Beck's takes on RPO concepts.

Coastal Carolina also returns leading rusher Braydon Bennett, who had 407 yards last season with five touchdowns. The Chants will need new blood to step up at receiver with the highest returning yardage total belonging to Jameson Tucker (423).

DEFENSE Coastal will have to replace its three leading tacklers from last year's campaign. Safety Juan Powell is the leading returning tackler with 55. In particular, they'll need to find new names who can help bolster the defensive front.

The unit was something of a "bend don't break" group last season, allowing 416 yards but only 23.8 points per game. They proved to be better at defending the pass than the run. The Chants picked off 14 passes, second-most in the league. Matthew McDoom returns in the secondary after breaking up 10 passes (four in the bowl game) and earning All-Sun Belt honorable mention honors.

SPECIALISTS Placekickers Kade Hensley and Liam Gray split duties last season, and both were perfect on extra points, going a combined 43-for-43. The Chants will look for a new punter after Evan Crenshaw transferred. Ja'Vin Simpkins was the primary return man last season, but the Chants also still have McDoom, who had those duties as a freshman in 2022.

FINAL ANALYSIS Beck's tenure with the Chants started slowly but picked up some momentum along the way. Without former quarterback Grayson McCall and just about all the other names that made Coastal an occasional national headline over the last few years, it's time for Beck and his staff to try and blaze their own trail on the teal field. If they can develop this young team enough for the program to reach a fifth straight bowl game, it will be an achievement.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Jacksonville St.
Sept. 7	William & Mary
Sept. 14	at Temple
Sept. 21	Virginia
Oct. 5	Old Dominion
Oct. 10	at James Madison
Oct. 19	Louisiana
Nov. 2	at Troy
Nov. 7	App State
Nov. 16	at Marshall
Nov. 23	Georgia Southern
Nov. 30	at Georgia State

2023 RESULTS (8-5, 5-3 SUN BELT)

Sept. 2	at UCLA	L	13-27
Sept. 9	Jacksonville State	W	30-16
Sept. 16	Duquesne	W	66-7
Sept. 21	Georgia State	L	17-30
Sept. 30	at Georgia Southern	L	28-38
Oct. 10	at App State	W	27-24
Oct. 21	at Arkansas State	W	27-17
Oct. 28	Marshall	W	34-6
Nov. 4	at Old Dominion	W	28-24
Nov. 11	Texas State	W	31-23
Nov. 18	at Army	L	21-28
Nov. 25	James Madison	L	14-56
Dec. 23	vs. San José St. #	W	24-14

#Hawaii Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Tray Taylor, WR	★★★
2.	D'marius Rucker, RB	★★★
3.	Elijah Lee, CB	★★★
4.	Jaitlin Hampton, CB	★★★
5.	Daniel Jones, OT	★★★
6.	Xakery Widner, WR	★★★
7.	DJ Moore, QB	★★★
8.	Zach Cody, CB	★★★
9.	Jalen Harris, WR	★★★
10.	Julius Tate, OL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Tim Beck • Record at School: 8-5 (1 year) • Career Record: 8-5 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Travis Trickett • Defensive Coordinator: Craig Naivar • Location: Conway, S.C. • Stadium: Brooks Stadium (21,000)

GEORGIA SOUTHERN EAGLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 107 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 6 | 2023 RECORD: 6-7, 3-5 SUN BELT

OFFENSE When you throw the ball 62 percent of the time, as Georgia Southern did last season, quarterback play is massively important. Davis Brin, the starter in 2023, has moved on, so the job is open with a few viable candidates, none of whom have a whole lot of prior experience. Redshirt sophomore JC French did appear in 10 games last season and scored his first career touchdown. Indiana transfer Dexter Williams II also has starting experience from 2022 under his belt.

Speaking of transfers, former 4-star Auburn tight end Tyler Fromm is intriguing. The 6-foot-5, 245-pounder was under-utilized in the SEC, totaling 14 catches for 165 yards over four years. There's also former 4-star Arizona State and Oklahoma wide receiver LV Bunkley-Shelton, who has 575 yards to his name.

As for the holdovers, last year's second-leading receiver Derwin Burgess Jr. returns after two consecutive seasons of earning All-Sun Belt honorable mention recognition.

DEFENSE The Eagles are hoping that in 2024, defensive experience leads to improvement. The Eagles have allowed 31 points per game each of the last three seasons. First-team All-Sun Belt linebacker Marques Watson-Trent returns after posting 13 tackles for a loss last season. He's had more than 110 tackles each of the last two seasons.

Newcomers such as Chance Gamble will also be ready to contribute. The former Kennesaw State safety started four games for the Owls last season before taking a redshirt. Georgia Southern's pass defense has been fairly strong in recent years, including 2023, when they intercepted 13 passes and returned three for touchdowns.

While the Eagles turn the ball over themselves quite a bit, they also force more than a few of their own. Their 13 interceptions were complemented by 15 forced fumbles, eight of which the Eagles recovered.

SPECIALISTS Freshman All-American DeAndre Buchannon is back after returning 23 kickoffs for 604 yards (26.3 ypr) and a touchdown last season. Sixth-year senior Michael Lantz led the Sun Belt in made field goals last season with 23 on 28 attempts. Punter Alex Smith is also back after placing 18 punts inside the 20-yard line.

FINAL ANALYSIS When you run as aggressive a passing offense as Georgia Southern does, turnovers are going to happen. However, they clearly have to happen less frequently for the Eagles, whose 31 turnovers were tied with Nebraska for the most in FBS. Another postseason berth is certainly possible, but shouldn't it be more than that in Year 3 of the Clay Helton era?

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Boise State
Sept. 7	at Nevada
Sept. 14	South Carolina St.
Sept. 21	at Ole Miss
Sept. 28	at Georgia State
Oct. 12	Marshall
Oct. 19	James Madison
Oct. 24	at Old Dominion
Nov. 2	at South Alabama
Nov. 16	Troy
Nov. 23	at Coastal Carolina
Nov. 30	App State

2023 RESULTS (6-7, 3-5 SUN BELT)

Sept. 2	The Citadel	W	34-0
Sept. 9	UAB	W	49-35
Sept. 16	at Wisconsin	L	14-35
Sept. 23	at Ball State	W	40-3
Sept. 30	Coastal Carolina	W	38-28
Oct. 14	at James Madison	L	13-41
Oct. 21	ULM	W	38-28
Oct. 26	Georgia State	W	44-27
Nov. 4	at Texas State	L	24-45
Nov. 11	at Marshall	L	33-38
Nov. 18	Old Dominion	L	17-20
Nov. 25	at App State	L	27-55
Dec. 16	vs. Ohio #	L	21-41

#Myrtle Beach Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Nasir Smith, DL	★★★
2.	Jordan Woolen, WR	★★★
3.	Devin Collier, ATH	★★★
4.	Jalen Burgess, OL	★★★
5.	Taeo Todd, ATH	★★★
6.	Elijah McDowell, S	★★★
7.	Antavious Murphy, WR	★★★
8.	Jaquari Brown, CB	★★★
9.	Keon Davis, WR	★★★
10.	Jaylen Bentley, S	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Clay Helton • Record at School: 12-14 (2 years) • Career Record: 58-38 (8+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Ryan Aplin • Defensive Coordinator: Brandon Bailey • Location: Statesboro, Ga.
Stadium: Allen E. Paulson Stadium (25,000)

Jalen White

Frank Fortune/Savannah Morning News

SCOUTING THE EAGLES

"Night and day from the start of the season until the end. ... They have some talented pieces down there, but you never got the sense they were confident about what they wanted to do with that offense. They've changed play-callers to [Ryan] Aplin, who understands the lea-gue really well from playing quarterback for Arkansas State, and the Indiana transfer [Dexter Williams II] could be a really interesting piece for them. ... I think there's pressure on them here to get the offense right. The standard at Southern isn't to be .500. Since they've come up they've struggled in almost every place where a program like App State has found a solution. Their administration expects to be at that level, too."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	17	Dalen Cobb (Jr.)	19	Josh Dallas (So.)
WR	2	**DERWIN BURGESS JR. (SR.)**	4	LV Bunkley-Shelton (Sr.)
WR	15	DeAndre Buchannon (Fr.)	19	Josh Dallas (So.)
LT	78	Caleb Cook (Jr.)	68	Nate Lewis (So.)
LG	74	**PICHON WIMBLEY (JR.)**	64	Caelan Williams (Sr.)
C	57	**CHANDLER STRONG (SO.)**	55	Ethan WIlliams (Fr.)
RG	58	Kyle Frazier (Sr.)	72	Justin Kanyuk (So.)
RT	75	Bryson Broadway (Sr.)	78	Caleb Cook (Jr.)
TE	11	Beau Johnson (Sr.)	7	Tyler Fromm (Sr.)
QB	9	Dexter Williams II (Fr.)	16	Colton FitzGerald (Jr.)
RB	25	**JALEN WHITE (SR.)**	22	OJ Arnold (Jr.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE	13	**ISAAC WALKER (JR.)**	18	MJ Stroud (So.)
DT	88	**JUSTIN RHODES (SR.)**	94	Elhadj Fall (So.)
DT	57	**LATRELL BULLARD (JR.)**	53	Trevon Locke (Jr.)
DE	91	**DAVION RHODES (JR.)**	90	Da'Shawn Davis (Jr.)
MLB	1	**MARQUES WATSON-TRENT (SR.)**	15	Davon Gimore (Sr.)
OLB	34	Jamari Whitehead (Fr.)	52	Jacob Ferguson (Sr.)
CB		Isaiah Norris (Sr.)	27	Isaiah Screen (Jr.)
CB	12	Tracy Hill Jr (So.)	11	Deontre Morris (Jr.)
NB	22	**MARC STAMPLEY II (JR.)**	25	Ayden Jackson (So.)
S	16	**TYRELL DAVIS (JR.)**	31	Chance Gamble (Jr.)
S	5	**TJ SMITH (SR.)**	14	Prince Green (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	98	Michael Lantz (Sr.)	KR	15	DeAndre Buchannon (Fr.)
P	90	Alex Smith (Fr.)	PR	22	OJ Arnold (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Gavin Pringle

SCOUTING THE PANTHERS

"It's never a good situation when you're starting Year 1 this late in the coaching cycle. The upside is that Dell [McGee] is really familiar with the area and the city, and he actually put together a good staff, all things considered. [Jim] Chaney is a veteran and a pro who will help them make the best of what they can on offense. ... The focus here is the head coach, who is a recruiter who understands the city and state, building out a plan that keeps better high school talent home playing for State, and finding that balance of portaling homegrown guys back. This season is just about setting that foundation. You can't ask for much more than that, but this could be a really good hire a few years from now."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	8	Ja'Cyais Credle (Sr.)	83	LaMarcus Brand (Sr.)
WR	11	**CADARRIUS THOMPSON (SR.)**	0	Peter Kikwata (Jr.)
WR	16	**TAILIQUE WILLIAMS (SR.)**	13	Darius Bush (Jr.)
LT	67	Ben Chukwuma (Sr.)	71	Kyrik Mason (Jr.)
LG	72	Joshua Black (Sr.)	75	Colin Henrich (Jr.)
C	70	Alec Johnson (So.)	75	Colin Henrich (Jr.)
RG	78	Lamar Robinson (Jr.)	69	MarQuez Bargman (Jr.)
RT	63	**TREVOR TIMMONS (JR.)**	68	Mason Cook (Sr.)
TE	84	**KRIS BYRD (SR.)**	85	**AHMON GREEN (SR.)**
QB	1	Zach Gibson (Sr.)		Christian Veilleux (Jr.)
RB	25	Freddie Brock (Jr.)	4	CJ Beasley (Sr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	20	Victoine Brown (Jr.)	44	Corey Brown (So.)
DT	10	**HENRY BRYANT III (JR.)**	56	Fuches Lewis II (Jr.)
DT	52	**ANTHONY BLUME (SR.)**	0	Ricardo Williams Jr. (Sr.)
OLB	47	KD McDaniel (Sr.)	9	Kevin Swint (Sr.)
ILB	25	Josiah Robinson (Jr.)	2	Tavian Brown (Sr.)
OLB	48	**JUSTIN ABRAHAM (SR.)**	33	Ozzie Hoffler (Jr.)
CB	3	**GAVIN PRINGLE (SR.)**	23	Jaylen Jones (Fr.)
CB	7	Izaiah Guy (So.)	28	Marlon McClendon (Fr.)
NB	24	**RONALD COOPER (SR.)**		Mumu Bin-Wahad (Jr.)
S	32	Cody Jones (Sr.)	27	Jacorrei Turner (Jr.)
S	6	**JEREMIAH JOHNSON (SR.)**	14	Cam Marshall (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	92	Liam Rickman (Jr.)	KR	14 Cam Marshall (Fr.)
P	94	Kade Loggins (Jr.)	PR	14 Cam Marshall (Fr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

IVAN KONON PHOTO IG_@KONONPHOTO

GEORGIA STATE PANTHERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 123 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 7 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 3-5 SUN BELT

OFFENSE Former Georgia State head coach Shawn Elliott's resignation was one of the stranger moves of the offseason, mostly because it happened during their spring practice. The Panthers were fortunately able to hire Georgia associate head coach Dell McGee, formerly an accomplished high school coach in the state, as Elliott's replacement. Because of the timing, the roster is in a state of limbo.

However, it can be said with confidence that the Panthers will look to Georgia Tech transfer Zach Gibson as their starting quarterback. He saw no action for the Yellow Jackets in 2023 but made three starts in 2022.

One of the other more intriguing transfer pieces on the roster is former Coastal Carolina running back CJ Beasley. Beasley was an all-purpose contributor for the Chanticleers with just under 1,000 yards rushing and 344 yards receiving over the last two seasons. The Panthers also have returning running back Freddie Brock, who got his first start in Georgia State's bowl game. Brock rushed for 276 yards on 24 carries in that contest. It stands to reason that both will be major factors in the offense.

DEFENSE The only returning All-Sun Belt performer for the Panthers is cornerback Gavin Pringle. The redshirt senior had four interceptions, including a pick-6, and four pass breakups last season. Panther faithful should hope he helps lead the defense to a better showing this year. They were the worst Sun Belt team against the pass last year, allowing 279.5 yards through the air and 30 touchdowns.

Replacing Jontrey Hunter's 96 tackles will be a challenge for the front seven. Linebacker Justin Abraham tied for the team lead in tackles for a loss with eight. If the South Carolina native sticks around, he'll be one of the leaders of the group. Rotational linebacker Josiah Robinson is in the same boat after 41 tackles and 2.5 sacks last season. The Panthers allowed 145.8 rushing yards per game, fifth in the league.

SPECIALISTS Redshirt junior Kade Loggins is an exceptional punter who booted eight for more than 50 yards last season and landed 20 kicks inside the 20-yard line. In the spring, Georgia State had five different placekickers on the roster, so that spot seems up for grabs after the Panthers made just nine field goals last season. There's not yet a clear frontrunner for the return specialist, either.

FINAL ANALYSIS Considering the timing, the hiring of McGee was a hit, although it may take a minute for the impact to come into full view. His recruiting acumen, which he didn't have the chance to exercise this cycle, will help. For now, it might be a Year Zero situation.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Georgia Tech
Sept. 7	Chattanooga
Sept. 14	Vanderbilt
Sept. 28	Georgia Southern
Oct. 12	Old Dominion
Oct. 17	at Marshall
Oct. 26	at App State
Nov. 2	at Connecticut
Nov. 9	at James Madison
Nov. 16	Arkansas State
Nov. 23	at Texas State
Nov. 30	Coastal Carolina

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 3-5 SUN BELT)

Aug. 31	Rhode Island	W 42-35
Sept. 9	Connecticut	W 35-14
Sept. 16	at Charlotte	W 41-25
Sept. 21	at Coastal Carolina	W 30-17
Sept. 30	Troy	L 7-28
Oct. 14	Marshall	W 41-24
Oct. 21	at Louisiana	W 20-17
Oct. 26	at Georgia Southern	L 27-44
Nov. 4	James Madison	L 14-42
Nov. 11	App State	L 14-42
Nov. 18	at LSU	L 14-56
Nov. 25	at Old Dominion	L 24-25
Dec. 23	vs. Utah State #	W 45-22

#Famous Idaho Potato Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Recordo Tarver, WR	★★★
2.	Deuce Walker, CB	★★★
3.	Avery McFadden, WR	★★★
4.	Malachi Marshall, QB	★★★
5.	Lane Wadle, TE	★★★
6.	Dominic Johnson, OL	★★★
7.	Austin McGee, CB	★★★
8.	Damaine Wilson, LB	★★★
9.	Dominic Braesch, OL	★★★
10.	Deity Deablo, EDGE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Dell McGee • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 1-0 (1 year)
Offensive Coordinator: Jim Chaney • Defensive Coordinator: Kevin Sherrer • Location: Atlanta, Ga.
Stadium: Center Parc Credit Union Stadium (24,333)

JAMES MADISON DUKES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 86 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 2 | 2023 RECORD: 11-2, 7-1 SUN BELT

OFFENSE Per new James Madison head coach Bob Chesney, roughly 96 percent of JMU's production from last season is no longer with the program, due either to graduation or the transfer portal. Last season's Sun Belt Coach of the Year, Curt Cignetti, is now at Indiana.

A good place to start with the changes is under center. With Sun Belt Player of the Year Jordan McCloud now at Texas State, former Washington starter Dylan Morris is settling in and should fit comfortably into Chesney's offensive system. Chesney's Holy Cross team averaged 37 points per game last season.

Morris won't have to do it all though, thanks in part to a pair of high-profile transfer running backs. Former 4-star recruit George Pettaway has arrived from North Carolina, and senior Ayo Adeyi comes on board from North Texas after a 1,000-yard season in 2023. Holy Cross was one of the most effective rushing offenses in FCS last season with 6.3 yards per carry, so look for Chesney's offense to try to establish the run.

DEFENSE The Dukes might not give the type of defensive performance that they put on in 2023, when they allowed just 2.6 yards per carry. However, there's reason to be optimistic in 2024.

The reliance on transfers and younger players will extend to the defensive side of the ball as well. Two former 4-star recruits jump out right away.

The first is edge rusher Lloyd Summerall from USF. The 6-foot-5, 240-pounder had 21 tackles for the Bulls last season after spending his first four seasons at Florida. The second is linebacker Raymond Scott from Fresno State. Scott enters his seventh college season after four at USC and two with the Bulldogs. He had 22 tackles in eight games last season in Fresno. All that experience up front will come in handy.

SPECIALISTS Redshirt senior punter Ryan Hanson was a second-team All-Sun Belt selection after averaging 40.6 yards per punt last season. Sophomore DJ Barksdale is also back as the primary kick returner this season after averaging 21.3 yards per return. JMU currently has two placekickers on the roster, neither of whom has seen college action yet.

FINAL ANALYSIS The last thing JMU fans want to see is for the program to lose its momentum after Cignetti's departure. Chesney has made a great impression so far, however. JMU's lack of returning production is concerning and might be hard to overcome initially. But if the Dukes can get within shouting distance of the kind of offensive production that Chesney had at Holy Cross (an average of more than seven yards per play), continued FBS success for the Dukes will be on the horizon.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Charlotte
Sept. 7	Gardner-Webb
Sept. 21	at North Carolina
Sept. 28	Ball State
Oct. 5	at ULM
Oct. 10	Coastal Carolina
Oct. 19	at Georgia Southern
Oct. 26	Southern Miss
Nov. 9	Georgia State
Nov. 16	at Old Dominion
Nov. 23	at App State
Nov. 30	Marshall

2023 RESULTS (11-2, 7-1 SUN BELT)

Sept. 2	Bucknell	W	38-3
Sept. 9	at Virginia	W	36-35
Sept. 16	at Troy	W	16-14
Sept. 23	at Utah State	W	45-38
Sept. 30	South Alabama	W	31-23
Oct. 14	Georgia Southern	W	41-13
Oct. 19	at Marshall	W	20-9
Oct. 28	Old Dominion	W	30-27
Nov. 4	at Georgia State	W	42-14
Nov. 11	Connecticut	W	44-6
Nov. 18	App State (ot)	L	23-26
Nov. 25	at Coastal Carolina	W	56-14
Dec. 23	vs. Air Force #	L	21-31

#Armed Forces Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Tyjai Hopper, CB	★★★
2.	Milton Ferguson, CB	★★★
3.	Keelan Flowe, CB	★★★
4.	Mercellus Nash, EDGE	★★★
5.	Immanuel Ezeogu, LB	★★★
6.	JC Evans, QB	★★★
7.	Evan Bushong, OL	★★★
8.	Deacon Rawls, OT	★★★
9.	Kobe Campbell, OL	★★★
10.	Chase Regan, S	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bob Chesney • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 111-46 (14 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Dean Kennedy • Defensive Coordinator: Lyle Hemphill • Location: Harrisonburg, Va.
Stadium: Bridgeforth Stadium (25,000)

Chauncey Logan

SCOUTING THE DUKES

"Expect a pretty significant step back from these guys while they retool under [Bob] Chesney. They can still win right away with the roster, but there's a gap coming as they transition. ... Cig [Curt Cignetti] took a pretty solid group of guys with him to IU, and they graduated some pretty solid role players, too. Chesney is a winner at every level so far, but they'll be judged on how they recruit and how fast they can refill that roster. They've been big on the portal early. ... [Dylan] Morris is a really strong QB who got beat out by a first-round guy [Michael Penix Jr.] at Washington; he should come in and give them an offensive identity right away. The defensive overhaul might take a bit longer."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	8	Maxwell Moss (So.)	9	Omarion Dollison (Sr.)
WR	19	Taji Hudson (Jr.)	82	Nakai Poole (Fr.)
WR	1	Cam Ross (Sr.)	0	Yamir Knight (So.)
LT	52	**TYSHAWN WYATT (SR.)**	50	Jesse Ramil (Jr.)
LG	60	Carter Sweazie (So.)	53	Hunter McClain (So.)
C	58	**TANNER MORRIS (SR.)**	70	Brett Davis (Jr.)
RG	66	**COLE POTTS (SR.)**	70	Brett Davis (Jr.)
RT	76	Pat McMurtrie (Sr.)	72	Josh Toner (Jr.)
TE	15	Kyi Wright (Sr.)	85	Jordan Funk (Sr.)
QB	5	Dylan Morris (Sr.)	11	Billy Atkins (Jr.)
RB	7	Ayo Adeyi (Sr.)	20	Tyler Purdy (Sr.)

DEFENSE (2)

DE	90	Terry Lockett Jr. (Jr.)	10	Amar Thomas (So.)
DT	15	Immanuel Bush (Jr.)	96	AJ Abbasi (Jr.)
DT	44	DJ Cotton Jr. (Fr.)	98	Samson Ogunade (Fr.)
DE	99	Eric O'Neill (Jr.)	9	Lloyd Summerall (Sr.)
OLB	27	Jacob Dobbs (Sr.)	52	Seth Naotala (Jr.)
MLB	5	Trent Hendrick (Jr.)	11	Raymond Scott (Sr.)
OLB	0	Taurus Jones (Sr.)	17	Gannon Weathersby (So.)
CB	31	Antoine Booth (Jr.)	30	Justin Eaglin (So.)
CB	2	**CHAUNCEY LOGAN (JR.)**	30	Justin Eaglin (So.)
S	32	DJ Barksdale (So.)	12	Kye Holmes (Jr.)
S	7	**JACOB THOMAS (JR.)**	14	KJ Flowe (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	95	Nick Gonzalez (Sr.)	KR	32	DJ Barksdale (So.)
P	48	Ryan Hanson (Sr.)	PR	3	Solomon Vanhorse (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

David Yeazell-USA TODAY Sports

J.J. Roberts

SCOUTING THE THUNDERING HERD

"Everyone's a little confused on the outside. Is the administration behind [Charles] Huff or not? The comments about NIL aren't surprising because that's a hardcore blue-collar culture. They're proud of that program, but NIL just doesn't fit that fan base. ... They're going Air Raid this year, which is going to be really tricky if they don't feel like they have a clear-cut starter headed into the summer. That's all reps-based, and they're under the gun entering this season. ... They've turned over a ton of players, but most schools at that level have. Huff is learning on the fly how to navigate the new recruiting landscape, and it shows."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	4	DeMarcus Harris (Sr.)	82	Marcel Williams (Fr.)
WR	9	Elijah Metcalf (Jr.)	8	Bralon Brown (Jr.)
WR	16	Christian Fitzpatrick (Sr.)	10	Chuck Montgomery (Jr.)
LT	76	Tariq Montgomery (So.)		Jeremy Jones (Sr.)
LG	70	Jalen Slappy (So.)		Cedrick Nicely (So.)
C	65	**LOGAN OSBURN (SR.)**	55	Bryce Ramsey (Jr.)
RG	57	Eric Meeks (So.)	55	Bryce Ramsey (Jr.)
RT	52	Elijah Ellis (Sr.)		Barrett Maddox (So.)
TE	87	Cade Conley (Jr.)	88	Rahmod Smith (Jr.)
QB		Mitch Griffis (Sr.)		Braylon Braxton (Jr.)
RB	6	Jordan Houston (Sr.)	28	Ethan Payne (Sr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	93	Jabari Ishmael (Jr.)	58	Braydin Ward (Fr.)
DT	7	Chris Thomas Jr. (Jr.)	12	Jason Shuford (Sr.)
DT	5	**TYQAZE LEGGS (SR.)**	99	Isaiah Gibson Sr. (Sr.)
DE	15	Michael Green (So.)	40	Joe Murray (Sr.)
ILB	25	J'Coryan Anderson (Sr.)	30	Jayden Yates (So.)
OLB	9	Landyn Watson (Jr.)	94	Jason Harris (Jr.)
CB	41	Ahmere Foster (So.)	20	TaShawn Jeter (Fr.)
CB	3	Ishmael Ibraheem (So.)	23	Jason Haggerty (Fr.)
NB	1	**JOSH MOTEN (JR.)**	29	Ishmael Roy (Sr.)
S	11	**J.J. ROBERTS (SR.)**	0	Ian Foster (Fr.)
S	10	Jacobie Henderson (Sr.)	2	Daytione Smith (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	90	Rece Verhoff (Jr.)	KR 28	Ethan Payne (Sr.)
P	98	Alec Clark (Fr.)	PR 28	Ethan Payne (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Marshall Athletics

MARSHALL THUNDERING HERD

NATIONAL FORECAST: 100 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 3 | 2023 RECORD: 6-7, 3-5 SUN BELT

OFFENSE New offensive coordinator Seth Doege takes over a group that struggled to score points in the back half of the 2023 season. After starting last year's campaign at 4-0, the Thundering Herd won just two of their final nine games and failed to score in double digits in four of their seven losses. That included a three-game stretch of losses in which they were outscored 85-24. Marshall was also the worst team in the Sun Belt in third-down conversions at 31.3 percent.

Their offensive output will, hopefully, be helped along by more fresh faces at key positions in Doege's offense.

The quarterback competition is especially intriguing. Cole Pennington, son of Marshall legend Chad Pennington, is a player with high expectations thrust upon him, but it remains to be seen if the redshirt freshman is ready. The Herd have two impressive transfers who will all push for snaps — former Wake Forest starter Mitch Griffis and former Tulsa starter Braylon Braxton.

DEFENSE Like the offense, many of the key pieces on defense will be different for the Herd this season, thanks to both graduation and the transfer portal. Redshirt sophomore Michael Green will lead a defensive front that was actually very good on third downs, leading the Sun Belt by allowing opponents to convert only 32.4 percent of the time. Marshall also had the best red zone defense in the league last season, allowing touchdowns on 23-of-50 trips.

Safety J.J. Roberts will be a name to watch after 73 total tackles last season, one of the highest returning tackle counts in the Sun Belt. The rest of the secondary will be fairly inexperienced, making living up to the body of work from the last few seasons all the more difficult for defensive coordinator Jason Semore.

SPECIALISTS Alec Clark will likely take over the punting duties for the Thundering Herd this season. He had seven punts last season, averaging 40.3 yards per kick. Placekicker Rece Verhoff returns after a season in which he made 11-of-18 field-goal attempts. The return team will have the difficult task of finding a replacement for Jayden Harrison, who had two return touchdowns last season before transferring to Notre Dame.

FINAL ANALYSIS This season marks a clear-cut make-or-break year for head coach Charles Huff. Even with three postseason trips under his belt, fans and administrators want to see a league title contender. Not that it was ever easy, but it's going to be tough to deliver those results in a Sun Belt Conference that seems to get more and more competitive every year.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Stony Brook
Sept. 7	at Virginia Tech
Sept. 21	at Ohio State
Sept. 28	W. Michigan
Oct. 5	App State
Oct. 12	at GA Southern
Oct. 17	Georgia State
Nov. 2	ULM
Nov. 9	at Southern Miss
Nov. 16	Coastal Carolina
Nov. 23	at Old Dominion
Nov. 30	at James Madison

2023 RESULTS (6-7, 3-5 SUN BELT)

Sept. 2	Albany	W	21-17
Sept. 9	at East Carolina	W	31-13
Sept. 23	Virginia Tech	W	24-17
Sept. 30	Old Dominion	W	41-35
Oct. 7	at NC State	L	41-48
Oct. 14	at Georgia State	L	24-41
Oct. 19	James Madison	L	9-20
Oct. 28	at Coastal Carolina	L	6-34
Nov. 4	at App State	L	9-31
Nov. 11	Georgia Southern	W	38-33
Nov. 18	at South Alabama	L	0-28
Nov. 25	Arkansas State	W	35-21
Dec. 19	vs. UTSA #	L	17-35

#Frisco Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Aidan Stenfeldt, TE	★★★
2.	Corey Myrick, CB	★★★
3.	Ryley McIntosh-Pearce, ATH	★★★
4.	Guylijah Theodule, CB	★★★
5.	Marcel Williams, WR	★★★
6.	Chris Stokes, DL	★★★
7.	MaLik Caswell, S	★★★
8.	JacQai Long, QB	★★★
9.	Moses Gray, RB	★★★
10.	Chason Clark, LB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Charles Huff • Record at School: 22-17 (3 years) • Career Record: 22-17 (3 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Seth Doege • Defensive Coordinator: Jason Semore • Location: Huntington, W. Va.
Stadium: Joan C. Edwards Stadium (30,475)

OLD DOMINION MONARCHS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 102 | SUN BELT EAST PREDICTION: 5 | 2023 RECORD: 6-7, 5-3 SUN BELT

OFFENSE The Monarchs were competitive in 2023; they just constantly found themselves in situations where they had to be perfect. Eleven of ODU's 13 games were decided by one score, and five of those ended in losses. That included the Famous Toastery Bowl, in which they blew a 35-14 lead in the fourth quarter and lost 38-35 to WKU in overtime.

In terms of yards per game, only ULM had a worse offense than Old Dominion (348.3) in the Sun Belt last season. Starting quarterback Grant Wilson, who transferred last year from FCS Fordham, had his moments with 17 touchdown passes as well as four rushing touchdowns. The offense as a whole, though, was rough around the edges.

From a pass-blocking perspective, Old Dominion had the worst offensive line in FBS last season. The Monarchs allowed 62 sacks, averaging nearly five per game. Offensive improvement starts with better line play.

DEFENSE The most notable individual performance of the 2023 season for Old Dominion was that of All-America linebacker Jason Henderson. Henderson has led FBS in total tackles each of the last two seasons after posting 170 in 2023. He missed spring practice recovering from a knee injury but is expected to return at some point during fall camp. He'll be one of five returning defensive starters for ODU.

One of those starters is defensive tackle Denzel Lowry, who earned All-Sun Belt honorable mention honors last season. He had three sacks with five tackles for a loss. Just as the O-line needs to win more battles up front, the defensive front needs to generate more of a push after the Monarchs a league-low 19 sacks last season.

There are no returning starters in the secondary, but there are some interesting transfers who will contribute. Former North Texas safety Patrick Smith-Young seems extremely likely to do so after being the second-leading tackler on the Mean Green last season with 77.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Ethan Sanchez has not missed an extra point in two seasons, which is somewhat rare in college football. He hit 66 percent of his field goals last season. Likely starting punter Seamus Hall is a Division II transfer who is capable of flipping the field with 70-yard punts. He had a 42-yard average last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS Once again, the Monarchs have a lot of questions heading into the season. Can they stay healthy? Do they have the guy at quarterback? Can they protect him? Can they hit the ground running in conference play? Finding answers is going to be essential if they want to achieve their first winning season since 2016.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at South Carolina
Sept. 7	East Carolina
Sept. 14	Virginia Tech
Sept. 28	at Bowling Green
Oct. 5	at Coastal Carolina
Oct. 12	at Georgia State
Oct. 19	Texas State
Oct. 24	Georgia Southern
Nov. 2	at App State
Nov. 16	James Madison
Nov. 23	Marshall
Nov. 30	at Arkansas St.

2023 RESULTS (6-7, 5-3 SUN BELT)

Sept. 2	at Virginia Tech	L	17-36
Sept. 9	Louisiana	W	38-31
Sept. 16	Wake Forest	L	24-27
Sept. 23	Texas A&M-Commerce	W	10-9
Sept. 30	at Marshall	L	35-41
Oct. 7	at Southern Miss	W	17-13
Oct. 21	App State	W	28-21
Oct. 28	at James Madison	L	27-30
Nov. 4	Coastal Carolina	L	24-28
Nov. 11	at Liberty	L	10-38
Nov. 18	at Georgia Southern	W	20-17
Nov. 25	Georgia State	W	25-24
Dec. 18	vs. WKU#(ot)	L	35-38

#Famous Toastery Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Maurki James, RB	★★★
2.	Quinn Henicle, QB	★★★
3.	Ahmaad Foster, DL	★★★
4.	Chris Forbes, DL	★★★
5.	Lor. McFadden-Pressley, DL	★★★
6.	Keshawn Mister, ATH	★★★
7.	Theo Bachelder, OT	★★★
8.	Taysean Stevenson, EDGE	★★★
9.	Joshua Schuetzmann, OT	★★★
10.	Brandon Crutchfield, CB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ricky Rahne • Record at School: 15-23 (3 years) • Career Record: 15-23 (3 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Kevin Decker • Defensive Coordinator: Blake Seiler • Location: Norfolk, Va.
Stadium: S.B. Ballard Stadium (19,818)

Jason Henderson

SCOUTING THE MONARCHS

"This could be a great season for them on offense. They built around the transfer quarterback [Grant Wilson] last season, and now they've got him locked as the starter with a lot of his guys returning. They've done a good job keeping their core intact with the transfer portal. ... Every game they played last season was close. I think every win they had was a single possession, but almost all of their losses were, too. Usually when you have a season like that and you can return your core, it pays dividends. ... It's hard to tell with the amount of roster turnover in that division, but if this isn't a breakout team, it's at least one on the upswing."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	11	Myles Alston (Jr.)	0	Diante Vines (Sr.)
WR	6	Kelby Williams (Jr.)	20	Dominic Dutton (Jr.)
WR	1	**ISIAH PAIGE (FR.)**	12	TJ Lott (Fr.)
LT	71	**SANTANA SAUNDERS (SR.)**	77	Keanon McNally (So.)
LG	58	**STEPHON DUBOSE-BOURNE (JR.)**	78	Elijah Hoskin (So.)
C	55	Maarten Woudsma (So.)	78	Elijah Hoskin (So.)
RG	51	Michael Flores (Sr.)	75	Skyler Grant (Jr.)
RT	64	Zach Barlev (Jr.)	77	Keanon McNally (So.)
TE	9	Jalen Butler (Jr.)	80	DJ Chandler (Jr.)
QB	13	**GRANT WILSON (JR.)**	2	Colton Joseph (Fr.)
RB	5	Aaron Young (Sr.)	4	Bryce Duke (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

DL	43	**KRIS TRINIDAD (JR.)**	4	Amorie Morrison (Jr.)
DL	8	**DENZEL LOWRY (JR.)**	99	Cole Daniels (Jr.)
DL	98	Christopher Spencer (So.)	52	Jonathan Bacigalupi (Jr.)
OLB	42	**JASON HENDERSON (SR.)**	47	Koa Naotala (So.)
ILB	1	**EJ GREEN (SR.)**	32	Ja'Mez Drummer (Jr.)
OLB	18	**MARIO THOMPSON (SO.)**	34	Jahleel Culbreath (So.)
CB	6	Rasheed Reason (Jr.)	0	Angelo Rankin Jr. (Sr.)
CB	16	Khian'Dre Harris (Jr.)	20	Langston Williams (Jr.)
NB	27	Ryan Ramey (So.)	15	Ashton Whitner (So.)
S	19	Jeremy Mack Jr. (Sr.)	3	Mario Easterly (Jr.)
S	2	Patrick Smith-Young (So.)	29	Markus Knight (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	92	Ethan Sanchez (Jr.)	KR	1	Isiah Paige (Fr.)
P	96	Ian Brandt (Fr.)	PR	1	Isiah Paige (Fr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Brian Bishop-USA TODAY Sports

Jaylen Raynor

SCOUTING THE RED WOLVES

"Credit to the school for being patient with Butch [Jones]. They've rebuilt the roster with really good recruiting classes and didn't cut any corners. [QB Jaylen] Raynor clicked for them down the stretch last year and could have a real breakout season. He's a playmaker in the purest sense of that term, and you could see where guys would just follow his energy during the games. He elevates the entire roster and gave them an identity; now they just have to build around him. ... This is their most complete depth chart since Jones got there; they've been young at basically every position for two years, so now I think you'll see them get back to that division-contender status this season or next. It's a transition year in a lot of ways for the league; these guys could jump up and surprise you.

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (10)

WR	7	**COREY RUCKER (JR.)**	5	Reginald Harden Jr. (Jr.)
WR	9	**COURTNEY JACKSON (SR.)**	15	**REAGAN EALY (SR.)**
WR	11	Adam Jones (Sr.)	4	Malik Hornsby (Jr.)
LT	65	Noah Smith (Jr.)	72	Tobias Braun (Jr.)
LG	71	**MEKHI BUTLER (SR.)**	55	Aleric Watson (So.)
C	73	**JACOB BAYER (SR.)**	54	Walker Davis (Fr.)
RG	50	Austin Woods (Jr.)	68	Tristian Smith (Jr.)
RT	77	**MAKILAN THOMAS (JR.)**	74	**ELIJAH ZOLLICOFFER (JR.)**
TE	13	Miller McCrumby (Jr.)	12	**MANNY STEVENSON JR. (SR.)**
QB	1	**JALEN RAYNOR (SO.)**	8	Josh Flowers (Fr.)
RB	2	**JA'QUEZ CROSS (SR.)**	21	Zak Wallace (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	32	Ethan Hassler (Sr.)	4	Bryan Whitehead (Jr.)
DT	45	**NATE MARTEY (SR.)**	47	Lucas Banks (Sr.)
DT	90	**TIM HARDIMAN (JR.)**	55	Micah Bland (Sr.)
DE	17	Blayne Toll (Sr.)	80	Kamari Stephens (Sr.)
OLB	36	**CHARLES WILLEKES (SR.)**	30	Andrew Agapos (Jr.)
MLB	23	Dane Motley (Sr.)	10	Jordan Sample (Fr.)
OLB	33	Cam Jeffery (Sr.)	22	Sam Graham (Jr.)
CB	7	Jordan Mahoney (Sr.)	6	Dontay Joyner (So.)
CB	0	Justin Hodges (Sr.)	2	Leon Jones (Sr.)
S	9	**TREVIAN THOMAS (SR.)**	19	James Reed III (Jr.)
S	29	**JUSTIN PARKS (SR.)**	41	Jerrod Johnson (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	32	Aidan Ellison (Jr.)	KR	2 Ja'Quez Cross (Sr.)
P	42	Magnus Haines (Jr.)	PR	9 Courtney Jackson (Sr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Jake Crandall/Advertiser

ARKANSAS STATE RED WOLVES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 88 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 2 | 2023 RECORD: 6-7, 4-4 SUN BELT

OFFENSE Under head coach Butch Jones, the Red Wolves have been making small steps back towards competitiveness. Last season's 6-7 squad was just a few small mistakes away from a winning season and a bowl victory.

A huge reason for A-State's mini-resurgence in 2023 was the emergence of quarterback Jaylen Raynor. A true freshman in 2023, Raynor was the Sun Belt's Freshman of the Year after completing 58.3 percent of his passes for 2,543 yards with 17 touchdowns and seven interceptions. Raynor also ran for five touchdowns and 380 yards. He'll be throwing to a group that includes talented leading receiver Corey Rucker and athletic converted quarterback Malik Hornsby.

With 10 returning starters, the offense is brimming with talent and experience. Unfortunately for the Red Wolves, the biggest question mark is All-Sun Belt starting center Jacob Bayer, who tore his ACL in spring practice. Coaches expect Bayer to return at some point this season, but finding an adequate substitute in the interim will likely lead to some shuffling up front in the early weeks of the season.

DEFENSE Simply put, Arkansas State has to do a better job of keeping opponents out of the end zone in 2024 under fourth-year defensive coordinator Rob Harley. Last season, the Red Wolves held only one FBS opponent under 21 points. They allowed an average of 30.4 points per game and allowed opponents to score on 80.7 percent of their red-zone trips.

Senior defensive tackle Nate Martey will be one of the leaders of the group. Martey had six sacks with nine tackles for a loss in 2023. Linebacker Charles Willekes earned All-Sun Belt honorable mention honors last season with 89 total tackles.

Transfers like defensive back Jordan Mahoney from UMass and edge rusher Bryan Whitehead from Liberty also look to make their mark on a defense that needs a spark in key moments.

SPECIALISTS Running back Ja'Quez Cross was a third-team All-Sun Belt selection last season as a return specialist. Both he and punt returner Courtney Jackson had returns for touchdowns last season. Both the presumptive starting kicker (Aidan Ellison) and punter (Magnus Haines) will have to step up after their predecessors have moved on.

FINAL ANALYSIS Optimism is understandably high after last season. A talented young quarterback with a team of supporting players who are another year wiser gives plenty of reason for it. The postseason should once again be the goal for the Red Wolves, alongside their first winning season under Jones, who is 11-26 entering his fourth season in Jonesboro.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Central Arkansas
Sept. 7	Tulsa
Sept. 14	at Michigan
Sept. 21	at Iowa State
Oct. 5	South Alabama
Oct. 12	at Texas State
Oct. 19	at Southern Miss
Oct. 26	Troy
Nov. 9	at Louisiana
Nov. 16	at Georgia State
Nov. 23	ULM
Nov. 30	Old Dominion

2023 RESULTS (6-7, 4-4 SUN BELT)

Sept. 2	at Oklahoma	L	0-73
Sept. 9	Memphis	L	3-37
Sept. 16	Stony Brook	W	31-7
Sept. 23	Southern Miss	W	44-37
Sept. 30	at Massachusetts	W	52-28
Oct. 7	at Troy	L	3-37
Oct. 21	Coastal Carolina	L	17-27
Oct. 28	at ULM	W	34-24
Nov. 4	Louisiana	W	37-17
Nov. 11	at South Alabama	L	14-21
Nov. 18	Texas State	W	77-31
Nov. 25	at Marshall	L	21-35
Dec. 23	vs. N. Illinois #	L	19-21

#Camellia Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Josh Flowers, QB	★★★
2.	Jayvion Showers, WR	★★★
3.	Jaylen Boardley, ATH	★★★
4.	Riley McGehee, OT	★★★
5.	Carmilo Allen, EDGE	★★★
6.	Obi Udom, DL	★★★
7.	Royce Baucom, OT	★★★
8.	Trason Hunt, OT	★★★
9.	Brandon Barnes Jr., ATH	★★★
10.	Chase Bogle, LB	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Butch Jones • Record at School: 11-26 (3 years) • Career Record: 95-80 (13+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Keith Heckendorf • Defensive Coordinator: Rob Harley • Location: Jonesboro, Ark.
Stadium: Centennial Bank Stadium (30,406)

LOUISIANA RAGIN' CAJUNS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 93 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 3 | 2023 RECORD: 6-7, 3-5 SUN BELT

OFFENSE After two consecutive 6-7 seasons, Louisiana fans want to see the Cajuns get back to the 10-win form that they displayed under former head coach Billy Napier. The offense did plenty of good things last season, including scoring 32.1 points per game, a number that placed the Cajuns just outside of the top 30 of FBS in that category.

Incumbent starting quarterback Ben Wooldridge missed most of last season with an injury after throwing 15 touchdown passes and five interceptions back in 2022 when he was healthy and played in 10 games. Chandler Fields has experience, and junior college transfer Samari Collier impressed in the spring, so the battle could extend into fall camp.

The strength of Louisiana's offense in 2023 was the rushing game, which posted a league-best 4.9 yards per carry. Returning running backs Dre'lyn Washington and Zylan Perry combined for 728 yards last season. Having an experienced offensive line with four returning starters should help the Cajuns repeat their ground success in 2024, even without mobile QB Zeon Chriss and departed running back Jacob Kibodi.

DEFENSE Louisiana will have most of its production returning, including leading tackler K.C. Ossai, who posted 95 tackles at his middle linebacker spot last season with 4.5 tackles for a loss. He was an All-Sun Belt honorable mention performer in 2023 and will be an anchor in the middle.

As a unit, the Cajuns were decent but not particularly exceptional. Getting off the field was a particular issue that must be corrected. On third down, opponents converted 44.3 percent of the time, and opponents scored on 82.8 percent of their red-zone trips. On average, Louisiana allowed opponents to gain 5.2 yards per play.

Longtime NFL assistant Jim Salgado will take over as defensive coordinator this season, with particular expertise in coaching secondaries. Salgado's most recent coaching stop was with the Washington Commanders, and he was at Michigan State before that.

SPECIALISTS Longtime placekicker Kenneth Almendares missed only one PAT out of 51 attempts last season and was 14-of-16 on field-goal attempts. Perry scored a touchdown on a kick return last season. Last season's punter Thomas Leo is off to the pros, which leaves that job open.

FINAL ANALYSIS Head coach Michael Desormeaux's job in replacing Napier was always going to be hard, but two losing seasons in a row have fans frustrated. To get themselves over the hump, the Cajuns simply have to do a better job of closing out close games. They lost five games by a touchdown or less last season.

K.C. Ossai

SCOUTING THE RAGIN' CAJUNS

"[Head coach Michael Desormeaux] is out there complaining about the portal, but they haven't been hit near as hard as other teams. That's the pressure of the standards set by the previous guy at UL, and what the program expects him to do. ... They have a lot of returning guys on both sides, and the transfer QB [Samari Collier] they brought in looked really solid in spring from what we saw, but the other two both have more system experience. That's gonna be a huge race to watch when summer practice starts. ... Defensively, they've got some really athletic pieces, and they can force turnovers. They're sound schematically. ... This is a good football team expecting to be great, and the pressure is on their guy this season."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	3	**HARVEY BROUSSARD (SO.)**	30	Trayv'on Culbert (Jr.)
WR	15	Robert WIlliams (Jr.)	13	Charles Robertson (So.)
WR	4	Jacob Bernard (Sr.)	81	Jaydon Johnson (So.)
LT	64	Bryant WIlliams (So.)	65	Xzavier Brown (Fr.)
LG	53	**AJ GILLIE (SR.)**	79	Mackey Maillho (Jr.)
C	55	**LANDON BURTON (SR.)**	50	Cooper Fordham (So.)
RG	70	**JAX HARRINGTON (JR.)**	75	Kaden Moreau (So.)
RT	71	**GEORGE JACKSON (JR.)**	77	King McGowen (Sr.)
TE	0	Terrance Carter (So.)	88	Caden Jensen (Fr.)
QB	10	**BEN WOOLDRIDGE (SR.)**	18	Chandler Fields (Sr.)
RB	20	Dre'lyn Washington (Jr.)	21	Zylan Perry (So.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	2	**ANTOINE BAYLIS (SR.)**	0	Jordan Lawson (Jr.)
DT	90	Kadarius Miller (Sr.)	92	Zavion Coleman (Fr.)
DT	9	**MASON NARCISSE (SR.)**	97	Lance Williams (So.)
JACK	19	**CAMERON WHITFIELD (JR.)**	31	Trey Fite (So.)
OLB	45	Caleb Kibodi (Jr.)	25	Carmycah Glass (So.)
MLB	8	**K.C. OSSAI (SR.)**	16	Kailep Edwards (Jr.)
STAR	13	Amir McDaniel (Sr.)	22	Jaden Dugger (Jr.)
CB	21	**KEYON MARTIN (SR.)**	10	Shadwel Nkuba II (Jr.)
CB	11	**CALEB ANDERSON (JR.)**	26	Justin Agu (Jr.)
S	7	**COURTLINE FLOWERS (JR.)**	20	Jalen Clark (Jr.)
S	3	Tyrone Lewis (Sr.)	4	Tyree Skipper (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	45	Kenneth Almendares (Sr.)	KR	21	Zylan Perry (So.)
P	40	Logan Klotz (Jr.)	PR	4	Jacob Bernard (Sr.)

Returning starters in ***BOLD***

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Grambling
Sept. 7	at Kennesaw State
Sept. 21	Tulane
Sept. 28	at Wake Forest
Oct. 5	at Southern Miss
Oct. 12	App State
Oct. 19	at Coastal Carolina
Oct. 29	at Texas State
Nov. 9	Arkansas State
Nov. 16	South Alabama
Nov. 23	Troy
Nov. 30	at ULM

2023 RESULTS (6-7, 3-5 SUN BELT)

Sept. 2	Northwestern St.	W	38-13
Sept. 9	at Old Dominion	L	31-38
Sept. 16	at UAB	W	41-21
Sept. 23	Buffalo	W	45-38
Sept. 30	at Minnesota	L	24-35
Oct. 7	Texas State	W	34-30
Oct. 21	Georgia State	L	17-20
Oct. 28	at South Alabama	W	33-20
Nov. 4	at Arkansas State	L	17-37
Nov. 9	Southern Miss (ot)	L	31-34
Nov. 18	at Troy	L	24-31
Nov. 25	ULM	W	52-21
Dec. 16	vs. Jacksonville St.#(ot)	L	31-34

#New Orleans Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Rahji Dennis, WR	★★★
2.	Priest Ashe, EDGE	★★★
3.	Samurai Collier, QB	★★★
4.	Devron Williams, OL	★★★
5.	Vosky Howard, WR	★★★
6.	Daniel Beale, QB	★★★
7.	Hutch Swilley, RB	★★★
8.	Avery Demery, S	★★★
9.	Steven Blanco, RB	★★★
10.	Na'Tori Brown, EDGE	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Michael Desormeaux • Record at School: 13-14 (2+ years) • Career Record: 13-14 (2+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Tim Leger • Defensive Coordinator: Jim Salgado • Location: Lafayette, La.
Stadium: Cajun Field (36,900)

Scott Clause/USA TODAY Network

Devin Voisin

SCOUTING THE JAGUARS

[Kane Wommack's] departure for Alabama felt like a blow for these guys. It wasn't like he was taking the next step as a head coach. This program has been on edge of breaking out for a few seasons, but it didn't happen. ... [New heaed coach Major Applewhite] brought back [defensive coordinator Will] Windham to the program, so you have a good idea what they're running on defense. I think the change will happen on offense, and they'll do some different stuff in terms of personnel and formation, just to open it up more. They didn't have a quarterback ready in the spring, or they were just hiding them. ... Don't expect them to come out looking like a Year 1 program. This staff is locked in; they've all been with the roster for a while."

—An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)				
WR	13	**JAVON IVORY (SR.)**	15	Shamar Sandgren (Sr.)
WR	1	**DEVIN VOISIN (SR.)**	81	Jeremiah Webb (Sr.)
WR	12	**JAMAAL PRITCHETT (SR.)**	11	Anthony Eager (Fr.)
LT	79	**JORDAN DAVIS (JR.)**	65	Josh McCulloch (Sr.)
LG	51	**REED BUYS (SR.)**	55	Malachi Preciado (So.)
C	69	Kenton Jerido (So.)	64	Seth Russo (Jr.)
RG	74	Reid Gavin (So.)	55	Malachi Preciado (So.)
RT	77	Malachi Carney (So.)	65	Josh McCulloch (Sr.)
TE	8	**DJ THOMAS-JONES (SR.)**	86	Todd Justice (Sr.)
QB	7	Gio Lopez (Fr.)	17	Bishop Davenport (So.)
RB	0	Braylon McReynolds (So.)	14	Kentrel Bullock (Jr.)
DEFENSE (3)				
DE	20	Lamondre Brooks (Jr.)	74	Johnathan Street (Jr.)
DT	99	**WY'KEVIOUS THOMAS (SR.)**	55	Maurice Strong Jr. (Sr.)
DT	90	Carlos Johnson Jr. (Sr.)	98	Bryston Dixon (Fr.)
DE	39	Dalton Hughes (Jr.)	18	RJ Moss Jr. (So.)
MLB	10	Aakil Washington (Sr.)	43	Taylor Milton (Sr.)
OLB	32	Blayne Myrick (So.)	15	Chrystyile Caldwell (So.)
CB	6	**RICKY FLETCHER (JR.)**	17	Reggie Neely (Jr.)
CB	19	Dallas Gamble (Sr.)	44	Michael Archie (Sr.)
NB	29	Wesley Miller (So.)	8	Jordan Scruggs (Jr.)
S	2	**JADEN VOISIN (SR.)**	3	Rickey Hyatt Jr. (Jr.)
S	7	Lardarius Webb Jr. (Jr.)	31	Mike Harris (Jr.)
SPECIALISTS				
K	99	Laith Marjan (Jr.)	KR	14 Kentrel Bullock (Jr.)
P	87	Jack Martin (Sr.)	PR	14 Kentrel Bullock (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Stephen Lew-USA TODAY Sports

SOUTH ALABAMA JAGUARS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 94 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 4 | 2023 RECORD: 7-6, 4-4 SUN BELT

OFFENSE In a coaching move that few expected, South Alabama head coach Kane Wommack resigned his position this offseason to become the defensive coordinator at the University of Alabama under Kalen DeBoer. Wommack was replaced as head coach by offensive coordinator and former Houston head coach Major Applewhite. Applewhite inherits six returning starters on offense in 2024, although he'll have to replace the starting quarterback, running back and leading receiver.

One player who will have to step up for his new head coach is redshirt freshman quarterback Gio Lopez. Lopez appeared in five games behind Carter Bradley last season and was a driving force in the Jaguars' bowl win over Eastern Michigan, throwing for three touchdowns and running for one. Athletic as he is, he'll be playing behind an offensive line that is replacing some key pieces and will have to jell quickly. His favorite target will likely be Devin Voisin, who missed most of last season with injury but caught 64 passes in 2022.

DEFENSE The Jaguars had the second-best total defense in the Sun Belt last season, allowing an average of 313.2 yards and 21 points per contest.

Safety Jaden Voisin was a first-team All-Sun Belt selection last season and will once again be critical to his team's success. He picked off four passes with 11 total passes defended and an impressive 71 tackles in 2023. Hanging on to him is a massive win for Applewhite and new defensive coordinator Will Windham. Oklahoma State transfer Lardarius Webb Jr. also adds a useful piece to the Jaguars' secondary.

Another important component of the defense will be defensive tackle Wy'Kevious Thomas' ability to plug up the middle. Thomas was an anchor on a unit that allowed a league-low 11 rushing touchdowns last season. The Georgia native has made at least 35 total tackles in each of the last three seasons.

SPECIALISTS Versatile running back Kentrel Bullock should once again return kickoffs after averaging 19.1 yards per return last season. Punter Jack Martin also returns after averaging 40.2 yards per punt on 42 punts last season. Laith Marjan has transferred in to handle placekicking after serving as a kickoff specialist for East Carolina last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS USA could be a sleeper in the Sun Belt race. The Jaguars have a handful of very impressive young offensive players. With Applewhite getting another shot at being a head coach, expect the Jags to once again have a scoring offense in the top quarter of FBS. Turnovers and penalties have been glaring issues, and that simply has to improve.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	North Texas
Sept. 7	at Ohio
Sept. 14	Northwestern State
Sept. 19	at App State
Sept. 28	at LSU
Oct. 5	at Arkansas State
Oct. 15	Troy
Oct. 26	ULM
Nov. 2	Georgia Southern
Nov. 16	at Louisiana
Nov. 23	at Southern Miss
Nov. 29	Texas State

2023 RESULTS (7-6, 4-4 SUN BELT)

Sept. 2	at Tulane	L	17-37
Sept. 9	SE Louisiana	W	35-17
Sept. 16	at Oklahoma State	W	33-7
Sept. 23	Central Michigan	L	30-34
Sept. 30	at James Madison	L	23-31
Oct. 7	at ULM	W	55-7
Oct. 17	Southern Miss	W	55-3
Oct. 28	Louisiana	L	20-33
Nov. 2	at Troy	L	10-28
Nov. 11	Arkansas State	W	21-14
Nov. 18	Marshall	W	28-0
Nov. 25	at Texas State	L	44-52
Dec. 23	vs. E. Michigan #	W	59-10

#68 Ventures Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jared Hollins, QB	★★★
2.	Amarion Fortenberry, S	★★★
3.	Tyler Carter, EDGE	★★★
4.	Jerrian Graham, ATH	★★★
5.	Achilles Woods, EDGE	★★★
6.	Tynean Goodwill, ATH	★★★
7.	Nathan Jennings, EDGE	★★★
8.	Da'Marion Bothwell, RB	★★★
9.	Jeremy Scott, WR	★★★
10.	Asher Hale, OT	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Major Applewhite • Record at School: 15-11 (2+ years) • Career Record: 15-11 (2+ years)
Offensive Coordinator: Rob Ezell • Defensive Coordinator: Will Windham • Location: Mobile, Ala.
Stadium: Hancock Whitney Stadium (25,450)

SOUTHERN MISS GOLDEN EAGLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 112 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 6 | 2023 RECORD: 3-9, 2-6 SUN BELT

OFFENSE Southern Miss has been plagued by injuries over the last few seasons and will hope to avoid entering any games this season with a depleted lineup. Injuries were a primary reason that the Golden Eagles started last season with a record of 1-7. They were outside the top 90 of FBS in most major categories, including yards per game (353.3).

Arguably the story of Southern Miss' offseason was the signing of Florida State quarterback Tate Rodemaker. Rodemaker made waves at FSU last season when he made his first start in three years in a 24-15 win over archrival Florida. The 6-foot-4 Valdosta, Georgia, native is the most likely candidate to win the starting job in Hattiesburg after throwing for 510 yards and five touchdowns in limited duty for the Seminoles.

Also figuring to be a key weapon is running back Rodrigues Clark. Clark transferred from Memphis prior to last season, but he split carries with Frank Gore Jr., now pursuing pro football. A healthy Clark would be the Eagles' featured back this season. He'll be running behind an offensive line that is being almost totally rebuilt.

DEFENSE With 51 passing and rushing touchdowns allowed last season, Southern Miss allowed opponents to find the end zone more than any other team in the Sun Belt. The Golden Eagles' 6.7 yards allowed per play also was the conference's worst.

New defensive coordinator Clay Bignell is charged with fixing things this season after spending the previous two seasons at FCS Eastern Illinois.

In terms of personnel, a few impact transfer players will be key parts of the equation. Safety Braxton Myers joins the Golden Eagles from Purdue after a high school career that earned him a 4-star rating. Coastal Carolina transfer Tre Pinkney is also intriguing addition given that he posted 50 tackles for the Chanticleers back in 2022.

SPECIALISTS The Golden Eagles could have benefited from a better kicking game in 2023. Returning placekicker Andrew Stein connected on 17 field goals out of 23 attempts. Punter Bryce Lofton also returns after landing 13 punts inside opponents' 20-yard line. Return man Tiaquelin Mims did take one punt return to the house last season and could take over kickoff returns as well in 2024.

FINAL ANALYSIS This is an important year for Will Hall and the Golden Eagles. Consecutive losing seasons are exceedingly rare in Hattiesburg, a place that is used to bowl trips. With two of his three seasons at the helm ending with only three wins, Hall now has the unenviable task of needing to produce a better team without the talent of Gore in his backfield.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	at Kentucky
Sept. 7	SE Louisiana
Sept. 14	South Florida
Sept. 21	at Jacksonville St.
Oct. 5	Louisiana
Oct. 12	at ULM
Oct. 19	Arkansas State
Oct. 26	at James Madison
Nov. 9	Marshall
Nov. 16	at Texas State
Nov. 23	South Alabama
Nov. 30	at Troy

2023 RESULTS (3-9, 2-6 SUN BELT)

Sept. 2	Alcorn State	W	40-14
Sept. 9	at Florida State	L	13-66
Sept. 16	Tulane	L	3-21
Sept. 23	at Arkansas State	L	37-44
Sept. 30	Texas State	L	36-50
Oct. 7	Old Dominion	L	13-17
Oct. 17	at South Alabama	L	3-55
Oct. 28	at App State	L	38-48
Nov. 4	ULM	W	24-7
Nov. 9	at Louisiana (ot)	W	34-31
Nov. 18	at Mississippi St.	L	20-41
Nov. 25	Troy	L	17-35

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Keyshawn Buckley, WR ★★★
2. Caleb Moore, DL ★★★
3. Aaron Travis, DL ★★★
4. Jalen Washington, RB ★★★
5. Jameer Lewis, LB ★★★
6. Dakota Thomas, WR ★★★
7. Jordan Johnson, S ★★★
8. Damion Miller, ATH ★★★
9. Reed Jesiolowski, TE ★★★
10. Miles Adams, DL ★★★

**Per On3*

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Will Hall • Record at School: 13-24 (3 years) • Career Record: 69-44 (9 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Chip Long • Defensive Coordinator: Clay Bignell • Location: Hattiesburg, Miss.
Stadium: M.M. Roberts Stadium (36,000)

Tiaquelin Mims

SCOUTING THE GOLDEN EAGLES

"[Will Hall] is a better coach than their record, but this is a program that's nowhere near what it was when G5 football first became a concept. ... The [offensive coordinator] Chip Long offense might not be the best fit for those players. There's a longer play call, more pro-style and pro-set stuff and it can be a lot to process and install. I don't think they're going to run their wildcat and spread stuff anymore with Long on board and with [running back Frank] Gore [Jr.] finally leaving. Defensively they were awful, honestly, but a lot of the secondary was out for the season. They might improve in every area and not hit .500."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (2)

WR	6	Javieon "J.J." Butler (So.)	11	Davis Dalton (So.)
WR	82	Larry Simmons (So.)	83	Dakota Thomas (Jr.)
WR	21	**TIAQUELIN MIMS (JR.)**	81	Keyshawn Buckley (Jr.)
LT	61	**GABE CAVAZOS JR. (JR.)**	64	Kyron Barnes (Jr.)
LG	54	Zack Conti (Sr.)	66	Kamron Barnes (So.)
C	58	Drew Lawson (Jr.)	74	Luke Rogers (Fr.)
RG	50	Wil Saxton (So.)	55	Klabron Pollard (So.)
RT	56	Greg Nunnery (Jr.)	75	Hastings Carruth (So.)
TE	38	Justyn Reid (So.)	85	Kyirin Heath (Jr.)
QB	18	Tate Rodemaker (Jr.)	13	Ethan Crawford (So.)
RB	0	Rodrigues Clark (Sr.)	2	Chandler Pittman (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	94	**KRISTIN BOOTH (SR.)**	98	Iliyas Fuavai (So.)
DT	96	**JALEN WILLIAMS (SR.)**	51	Demeco Roland (Sr.)
DT	36	Brodarius Lewis (Sr.)	99	Cameron Mackey (Fr.)
JACK	37	Eric Thomas Jr. (Sr.)	91	Ryan Johnson (Sr.)
OLB	39	Tre Pinkney (Sr.)	9	Kolbe Cage (Jr.)
MLB	10	Desmyn Baker (Sr.)	15	Ja'Len Sims (Sr.)
OLB	8	**JALIL CLEMONS (SR.)**	14	Jameer Lewis (Jr.)
CB	2	Michael Caraway Jr. (Sr.)	12	**QUES McNEAL (SR.)**
CB	16	Braxton Myers (Fr.)	7	Zay Franks (Jr.)
S	5	Jay Jones (Sr.)	11	**MJ DANIELS (SR.)**
S	18	Jordan Johnson (Jr.)	29	Hayes Puckett (Jr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	98	Andrew Stein (Sr.)	KR	21	Tiaquelin Mims (Jr.)
P	30	Bryce Lofton (Sr.)	PR	21	Tiaquelin Mims (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Melina Myers-USA TODAY Sports

Ismail Mahdi

SCOUTING THE BOBCATS

"These guys were the Colorado of the Group of 5 last year, and it worked out better than Colorado. They flipped that roster in one offseason and brought in some key pieces from Incarnate Word that helped get the offense going. ... Grabbing the JMU quarterback [Jordan McCloud] is gonna work out great for them. Stealing a QB in conference with that much talent, it speaks to how that system works in recruiting and not just on the field. ... Defensively, they lost the DC [Jonathan Patke] but they're going to probably still run a lot of the big, crazy blitz stuff to force turnovers. It's big risk-reward thinking, but it fits that offense. ... They could take a big step up and contend for the West title this season."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)

WR	2	**KOLE WILSON (JR.)**		Beau Sparks (So.)
WR	18	Drew Donley (Jr.)		Jaden Williams (Sr.)
WR	10	**JOEY HOBERT (SR.)**	16	Chris Dawn Jr. (So.)
LT	76	**NASH JONES (SR.)**	52	**TRENTON SCOTT (JR.)**
LG	64	**DORION STRAWN (JR.)**	75	Bami Badusi (Fr.)
C	77	Chayse Todd (Jr.)	71	Alex Harkey (Jr.)
RG		Tellek Lockette (Jr.)	65	**EMEKA OBIGBO (JR.)**
RT	73	Jimeto Obigbo (Sr.)		Isaiah Walker (Jr.)
TE		Blake Smith (Jr.)	9	**KONNER FOX (JR.)**
QB		Jordan McCloud (Sr.)	6	PJ Hatter (Fr.)
RB	21	**ISMAIL MAHDI (JR.)**		Deion Hankins (Sr.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE		Tunmise Adeleye (Jr.)		Steven Parker (Sr.)
DT	91	**TAVIAN COLEMAN (SR.)**	97	Dominique Ratcliff (Jr.)
DT	95	**TERRY WEBB (SR.)**		Alex Merritt (Sr.)
VIPER	33	**BEN BELL (SR.)**	11	Deven Wright (Sr.)
MLB		James Neal (Sr.)		Jordan Smith (Jr.)
OLB	14	Kenny Haynes (Sr.)		Max Harris (Jr.)
STAR	4	**ALONZO EDWARDS JR. (SR.)**	29	Caleb Coleman (Jr.)
CB	7	**CHRIS MILLS (SR.)**		Justin Harris (Jr.)
CB	1	**JOSHUA EATON (JR.)**		Trez Moore (Jr.)
S	20	**KALEB CULP (SR.)**	27	Bobby Crosby (Sr.)
S	12	**TORY SPEARS (JR.)**	5	Darius Jackson (So.)

SPECIALISTS

K	36	Mason Shipley (Jr.)	KR	21	Ismail Mahdi (Jr.)
P	38	David Nunez (Jr.)	PR	2	Kole Wilson (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Tim Heitman-USA TODAY Sports

TEXAS STATE BOBCATS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 83 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 1 | 2023 RECORD: 8-5, 4-4 SUN BELT

OFFENSE The transfer portal process just about evened out for Texas State this offseason, giving the Bobcats about 18 new players with most of them expected to make an immediate impact.

Arguably the biggest pickup for the Bobcats was that of quarterback Jordan McCloud. The redshirt senior was Sun Belt Conference Player of the Year last season at James Madison, where he threw for 3,657 yards with 35 touchdowns and 10 interceptions. Replacing TJ Finley's record-breaking production last season will be difficult, but McCloud is the ideal candidate to do so, which is incredibly fortunate for the Bobcats given the timing of his signing. He'll help the league's top scoring offense stay in form this season.

Texas State's rushing attack should also be potent this season. Ismail Mahdi rushed for more than 1,300 yards last season with the Bobcats, earning All-America honors from five different publications. TSU also added former UTEP running back Deion Hankins after he produced more than 2,600 yards in five seasons with the Miners.

DEFENSE Texas State will be looking to make significant strides on the defensive side of the ball after allowing 32.8 points per game last season, including surrendering 77 in a loss to Arkansas State. They also allowed 397.6 yards per game, adding to the stress in the back half of the season.

Safety Kaleb Culp is the program's leading returning tackler after posting 81 stops last season. Kulp is also a playmaker who broke up five passes and recovered four fumbles. Linebacker Ben Bell is another notable returner who notched 10 sacks and 16 tackles for a loss last season. UTEP transfer linebacker James Neal could also be one of the defense's main contributors out of the gate after 97 career tackles over the last three seasons in El Paso.

SPECIALISTS Kicker Mason Shipley made all 15 of his field-goal attempts last season and missed only one of his 59 extra-point attempts. Punter David Nunez has had to wait his turn for the job, but he should get it. He had one 54-yard boot back in 2021. Mahdi was a solid kick returner last season, when he was one of the league's five players to take a kickoff to the house.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's hard to remember a time when expectations were this high for Texas State football. Head coach G.J. Kinne's brand of offensive football seems to be jelling really well, and he boasts a surprisingly high amount of returning production. The Bobcats have the tools to get back to the postseason and could harbor legitimate championship aspirations, particularly if the defense improves.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Lamar
Sept. 7	UTSA
Sept. 14	Arizona State
Sept. 28	at Sam Houston
Oct. 3	at Troy
Oct. 12	Arkansas State
Oct. 19	at Old Dominion
Oct. 29	Louisiana
Nov. 9	at ULM
Nov. 16	Southern Miss
Nov. 23	Georgia State
Nov. 29	at South Alabama

2023 RESULTS (8-5, 4-4 SUN BELT)

Sept. 2	at Baylor	W	42-31
Sept. 9	at UTSA	L	13-20
Sept. 16	Jackson State	W	77-34
Sept. 23	Nevada	W	35-24
Sept. 30	at Southern Miss	W	50-36
Oct. 7	at Louisiana	L	30-34
Oct. 14	ULM	W	21-20
Oct. 28	Troy	L	13-31
Nov. 4	Georgia Southern	W	45-24
Nov. 11	at Coastal Carolina	L	23-31
Nov. 18	at Arkansas State	L	31-77
Nov. 25	South Alabama	W	52-44
Dec. 26	vs. Rice #	W	45-21

#First Responder Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Brock Riker, OL	★★★★
2.	Kylen Evans, WR	★★★
3.	Tyler Norris, OL	★★★
4.	Frederick Dotie, S	★★★
5.	Michael Sylvalie, LB	★★★
6.	Isaiah Walker Jr., OT	★★★
7.	Tice Williams, S	★★★
8.	Derrick Osmond, TE	★★★
9.	Carson Williams, CB	★★★
10.	Jabulani Thornton, WR	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: G.J. Kinne • Record at School: 8-5 (1 year) • Career Record: 20-7 (2 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Mack Leftwich • Defensive Coordinator: Dexter McCoil Sr. • Location: San Marcos, Texas
Stadium: Bobcat Stadium (30,008)

TROY TROJANS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 97 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 5 | 2023 RECORD: 11-3, 7-1 SUN BELT

OFFENSE With the departure of head coach Jon Sumrall and several key contributors, the Troy Trojans are massively depleted heading into the 2024 season. On the heels of back-to-back Sun Belt titles, it's going to be the first year of a program rebuild.

Former Notre Dame offensive coordinator Gerad Parker enters his first season at the helm and his first season ever as a head college coach, save for six weeks in the interim role at Purdue eight years ago.

Likely starting quarterback Goose Crowder completed nine passes on 13 attempts with a touchdown last season, his first since he transferred from West Virginia. He replaces Gunnar Watson. Running back Damien Taylor will have to help replace the production of NFL-bound Kimani Vidal, last year's Sun Belt Offensive Player of the Year. Several major contributors along the offensive line will also have to be replaced in 2024, presenting Parker with a number of questions for his debut season.

DEFENSE Under Sumrall, Troy played some of the best defense in school history. The Trojans featured the best scoring defense in the Sun Belt in 2023, allowing just 17.1 points per game. They also had the best total defense in the league, allowing only 308 yards per game.

While the defense also lost several major pieces to the portal and the professional ranks, a few notable Power 4 transfers have been added to the roster to help some of the returning contributors. That includes former Cincinnati edge rusher Jah-Mal Williams, who appeared in 10 games last season for the Bearcats.

Another notable transfer is former FCS Gardner-Webb linebacker Brendan Jackson, who had 71 tackles with 11.5 for a loss and four sacks and was an All-Big South selection last season. If the Trojans hope to continue their reputation of being statistically one of the top rushing defenses in football, Jackson will likely be integral. Troy allowed 3.2 yards per carry in 2023.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Scott Taylor Renfroe was perfect on PATs in 2023, going 50-for-50. He was 19-for-24 on field goal attempts. Punter Robert Cole had 13 punts of more than 50 yards last season. Devonte Ross averaged 21 yards per kickoff return, and with the departure of punt returner Jabre Barber, he'll likely pick up more of those duties.

FINAL ANALYSIS With a first-year head coach, it's tough to say where this program can go and how quickly it can get there. Going from a defensive coach to an offensive one without the key contributors to their championship runs makes the Trojans one of the biggest question marks in the G5.

2023 RESULTS (11-3, 7-1 SUN BELT)

Sept. 2	Stephen F. Austin	W	48-30
Sept. 9	at Kansas State	L	13-42
Sept. 16	James Madison	L	14-16
Sept. 23	WKU	W	27-24
Sept. 30	at Georgia State	W	28-7
Oct. 7	Arkansas State	W	37-3
Oct. 14	at Army	W	19-0
Oct. 28	at Texas State	W	31-13
Nov. 2	South Alabama	W	28-10
Nov. 11	at ULM	W	45-14
Nov. 18	Louisiana	W	31-24
Nov. 25	at Southern Miss	W	35-17
Dec. 2	App State #	W	49-23
Dec. 23	vs. Duke %	L	10-17

#SBC Championship %Birmingham Bowl

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Nevada
Sept. 7	at Memphis
Sept. 14	at Iowa
Sept. 21	Florida A&M
Sept. 28	ULM
Oct. 3	Texas State
Oct. 15	at South Alabama
Oct. 26	at Arkansas State
Nov. 2	Coastal Carolina
Nov. 16	at GA Southern
Nov. 23	at Louisiana
Nov. 30	Southern Miss

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1. Casey Fua'au, OL ★★★
2. Keion Dunlap, S ★★★
3. Shemar Welch, CB ★★★
4. Elijah Hall, S ★★★
5. Caleb Ash, OT ★★★
6. Semaj James, WR ★★★
7. Zeriah Beason, WR ★★★
8. Derek Burns, EDGE ★★★
9. Kam Weaver, LB ★★★
10. Marlin Odom, CB ★★★

***Per On3**

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Gerad Parker • Record at School: First season Career Record: 0-6 (1 year) • Offensive Coordinator: Sean Reagan Defensive Coordinators: Dontae Wright, Nathan Burton • Location: Troy, Ala. • Stadium: Veterans Memorial Stadium (30,470)

Jordan Stringer

SCOUTING THE TROJANS

"Gerad Parker is a different guy than [Jon] Sumrall, so there's going to be a period of adjustment. This isn't a league where you can just pick it up and coast anymore. Jon also took four really good defensive players with him to Tulane, and Parker's staff has portaled in as many guys as they could to keep that defense going. ... You can't replace a guy like Kimani Vidal. Even the old staff was really going to struggle had they stayed around. ... The reason for optimism is that you have to really understand Troy to succeed there. Jon got it, and Neal Brown got it, and Gerad has worked with Neal and he knows Jon. He goes in there with a good idea on what it takes and how to build winners there."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	6	**CHRIS LEWIS (JR.)**	8	Zeriah Beason (Jr.)
WR	1	Landon Parker (Sr.)	84	Caleb Chappelle (Jr.)
WR	7	Devonte Ross (Jr.)	2	Peyton Higgins (Jr.)
LT	52	Elijah Philippe (Jr.)	73	Tyler Bell (Fr.)
LG	58	Elijah Prather (Fr.)	50	Boaz Stanley (So.)
C	66	**ELI RUSS (JR.)**	65	Tyler Cappi (So.)
RG	74	**DANIEL KING (SR.)**	50	Boaz Stanley (So.)
RT	55	Tavon Matthews (Sr.)	71	Kyler Gibson (So.)
TE	14	Ethan Conner (Sr.)	88	Brody Dalton (Jr.)
QB	9	Goose Crowder (Jr.)	10	Tucker Kilcrease (So.)
RB	3	Damien Taylor (Jr.)	0	Gerald Green (Sr.)

DEFENSE (1)

DE	0	Raymond Cutts (Sr.)	10	Derek Burns (Jr.)
DT	98	Joshua Donald (Jr.)	92	Julian Peterson (Jr.)
DT	95	Luis Medina (Jr.)	92	Julian Peterson (Jr.)
BANDIT	8	Eric Shaw (Jr.)	5	Jah-Mal Williams (Jr.)
MLB	4	Brendan Jackson (Sr.)	6	**TERRY THOMAS (JR.)**
OLB	7	Jordan Stringer (Jr.)	13	TJ Thompson (Jr.)
OLB	3	Devin Lafayette (Jr.)	18	Jordan Perry (So.)
CB	12	Trent Henry (Jr.)	15	Semaj James (Jr.)
CB	9	Damaje Yancey (Sr.)	38	Jaquerius Thomas (Jr.)
S	14	Cecil Powell (Sr.)	27	John Butler (Jr.)
S	25	Justin Powe (So.)	26	Dorion Jackson (Fr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	40	Scott Taylor Renfroe (Jr.)	KR	7	Devonte Ross (Jr.)
P	48	Robert Cole (Sr.)	PR	7	Devonte Ross (Jr.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

Petre Thomas-USA TODAY Sports

David Godsey Jr.

Troy Taormina-USA TODAY Sports

SCOUTING THE WARHAWKS

"This is a difficult league to break out in, but watch these guys the next few years. Bryant [Vincent] was a really smart hire, and he's really well-connected in recruiting that region from his time at UAB and Alabama high schools. ... They've brought in UAB guys, New Mexico guys, and already that place is way more talented. It's a brutal deal there, the program has almost never been run seriously because of money and apathy, but this was a good first step. It may not show up at all in the win column, but they're out there fighting for talent and trying to brand themselves as a serious program. That's a first."

— An opposing Sun Belt assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (1)

WR	13	Jaedyn McKinstry (Jr.)	6	Marc Britt II (Sr.)
WR	17	Tristan Wiley (So.)	10	Justin Kimber (Jr.)
WR	84	Parker Hill (So.)		Tyler Griffin (Jr.)
LT	70	John Curtis Goodman Jr. (So.)	75	Austin Weiner (Sr.)
LG	58	**ELIJAH FISHER (JR.)**	64	Drew Hutchinson (So.)
C	59	Jay Mickle (Sr.)	76	Zach Moore (So.)
RG	78	Markell Smith (Sr.)	79	Thomas Little Jr. (So.)
RT	60	Sam Carson (Sr.)	62	Adameon Botley (So.)
TE	80	Quad Harrison (Jr.)	39	Cooper Eldridge (So.)
QB	2	Hunter Herring (Jr.)		Aidan Armenta (So.)
RB	21	Hunter Smith (So.)	26	Bennett Galloway (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	92	James Smith (So.)	96	Alvino Carbajal III (Jr.)
DT	14	**JAYLAN WARE (SR.)**	97	Earl Barquet Jr. (Sr.)
DT	94	Dylan Howell (Jr.)		Jaden Hamlin (Jr.)
DE		Billy Pullen (Jr.)		Davin Anderson (Jr.)
MLB	35	**CARL GLASS JR. (SR.)**	32	Nick Torres (Sr.)
OLB	4	**TRAVOR RANDLE (SR.)**	38	Markeegan Gray (Sr.)
OLB	54	Brett Drillette (Jr.)	28	Azain Brown (Jr.)
CB	13	**DAVID GODSEY JR. (JR.)**	21	Jyren Ester (Jr.)
CB	7	**CAR'LIN VIGERS (SR.)**		Duece Mayberry (Sr.)
S		Jahmal Sam (Sr.)		Lynard Harris (So.)
S	5	Ra'Shad Onezime (So.)	9	Andre Mack (Sr.)

SPECIALISTS

K	43	Luke Stagg (Sr.)	KR	21 Hunter Smith (So.)
P	52	Braxton Guilbeau (Jr.)	PR	21 Hunter Smith (So.)

*Returning starters in **BOLD***

ULM WARHAWKS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 133 | SUN BELT WEST PREDICTION: 7 | 2023 RECORD: 2-10, 0-8 SUN BELT

OFFENSE Former New Mexico offensive coordinator Bryant Vincent takes over a program that went 10-26 in three seasons under Terry Bowden, including a 2-10 season in 2023, when the Warhawks won their first two games but lost their final 10. ULM struggled in just about every offensive category last season, finishing outside the top 100 in points per game (17.3), yards per game (321.1), yards per play (5.1), third-down percentage (32.4) and red-zone scoring percentage (62.2).

With only one returning starter (guard Elijah Fisher), the offensive personnel will be an interesting tapestry of newly acquired portal players. Nevertheless, the Warhawks are fortunate to have several useful veterans on offense, notably on the offensive line. Fisher was an All-Sun Belt honorable mention performer last season blocking for leading rusher Hunter Smith, who averaged 5.4 yards per carry as a freshman.

DEFENSE Once again, by just about every metric, ULM fielded just about the worst defense in college football last season, so improvement is a reasonable expectation.

ULM's secondary will be filled with new and largely unproven faces, although both starting cornerbacks — David Godsey Jr. and Car'lin Vigers — return. The Warhawks were one of the 10 worst passing defenses in the FBS last season, allowing 275 yards per game. Getting off of the field also has to be a bigger priority for ULM in 2024. They allowed opponents to convert 51 percent of third downs and 57 percent of fourth downs.

The Warhawks saw a slightly more encouraging performance in the early part of the season, starting with a win over Army in which they were the better team in the trenches. They'll need more performances like that one on a consistent basis after posting 24 sacks and 12 forced fumbles last season.

SPECIALISTS ULM punter Braxton Guilbeau booted it 61 times last season with eight of them traveling 50-plus yards. He tied for the longest punt in the league last season with a 74-yard rocket. Placekicking duties are up for grabs, and kick return duties are also a tossup, although Smith is more than capable in that department. However, it's questionable whether putting your most talented running back at that spot is the best strategy.

FINAL ANALYSIS It's the first year of a rebuild after the last rebuild never really got off of the ground. As a result, expectations for 2024 should be fairly low as Vincent remolds things in his own vision. Vincent has stated his confidence in what ULM can be long term, but in the short term, they'll need to put one foot in front of the other and try to exceed their two-win total from last year.

2024 SCHEDULE

Aug. 31	Jackson State
Sept. 7	UAB
Sept. 21	at Texas
Sept. 28	at Troy
Oct. 5	James Madison
Oct. 12	Southern Miss
Oct. 26	at South Alabama
Nov. 2	at Marshall
Nov. 9	Texas State
Nov. 16	at Auburn
Nov. 23	at Arkansas State
Nov. 30	Louisiana

2023 RESULTS (2-10, 0-8 SUN BELT)

Sept. 2	Army	W	17-13
Sept. 9	Lamar	W	24-14
Sept. 16	at Texas A&M	L	3-47
Sept. 30	App State	L	40-41
Oct. 7	South Alabama	L	7-55
Oct. 14	at Texas State	L	20-21
Oct. 21	at Georgia Southern	L	28-38
Oct. 28	Arkansas State	L	24-34
Nov. 4	at Southern Miss	L	7-24
Nov. 11	Troy	L	14-45
Nov. 18	at Ole Miss	L	3-35
Nov. 25	at Louisiana	L	21-52

TOP 10 RECRUITS*

1.	Jaden Hamilin, DL	★★★
2.	Quentis Griffin, OL	★★★
3.	Billy Pullen, EDGE	★★★
4.	Jonathan Bibbs, WR	★★★
5.	Kajuan Robinson, DL	★★★
6.	Nate Green, OT	★★★
7.	Nathaniel Blount, RB	★★★
8.	Jaden Rowe, OL	★★★
9.	Bradyn Smith, DL	★★★
10.	Sam Liu, OL	★★★

Per On3

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Bryant Vincent • Record at School: First season • Career Record: 7-6 (1 year)
Offensive Coordinator: Bryant Vincent • Defensive Coordinator: Earnest Hill • Location: Monroe, La.
Stadium: Malone Stadium (27,617)

END OF AN ERA

NICK SABAN'S IMPACT ON COLLEGE FOOTBALL IS (AND ALWAYS WILL BE) UNMATCHED

BY STEVEN LASSAN, COLLEGE FOOTBALL EDITOR

As with any coaching retirement for someone at the top of his game, the discussion about legacy started the day Nick Saban walked away from coaching. However, that discussion should be a short one: Saban is the greatest coach in college football history.

Sure, Saban didn't go out on top after a College Football Playoff semifinal loss in the Rose Bowl to Michigan. However, Alabama's 2023 season was arguably one of his better coaching jobs and only added to the résumé, which includes 297 victories and seven national championships.

With Saban already having transitioned into a talking head and elder statesman role, let's explain why the former Toledo, Michigan State, LSU and Alabama head coach is the best of all time.

LONGEVITY AND CONSISTENT WINNING ///

From 2007-23, Saban won 206 games and brought six national championships to Tuscaloosa. In 17 years with Saban at the helm, the Crimson Tide lost more than two games in SEC play only twice. Overall, Alabama went 120-18 in SEC action and finished with an unbeaten conference record six times.

Despite scholarship limits, constant changes in the sport with NIL and transfers, and schematic tweaks with the way the game is played, Alabama never missed a beat on the field.

Winning consistently at a high level and for a long period of time isn't easy. But Saban managed to do that at Alabama; he went 48-16 with a national title at LSU; he posted a 34-24-1 mark at Michigan State (1995-99); and he went 9-2 in his only season as the head coach at Toledo.

No matter the year, conference, team or wave of change in college football, Saban's teams consistently won at a high level.

ADAPTABILITY /// Whether it's adapting to use the transfer portal, NIL or scheme changes, the game's rapid evolution wasn't a barrier to success for Saban's teams. Alabama was more geared to ground-and-pound on offense and play to its defense at the start of his tenure, but the Crimson Tide adapted to use more spread/no-huddle schemes as the game changed.

Saban's defenses found ways to better combat the high-powered offenses and defend passing games after deploying groups suited to stuff the run at the start of his tenure in Tuscaloosa.

Staying with the trends and constantly evolving is a big reason why Saban's teams consistently won and competed for national championships.

SUCCESS AT A HIGH LEVEL /// With six national titles at Alabama and one at LSU, Saban has the most by a head coach in college football history. Consider this: An 11-2 season with a finish of No. 5 in the final rankings (2023's outcome) was considered a "down year" in Tuscaloosa.

Kirby Lee/USA Today Sports

COACHING TREE /// Having an eye for coaching talent was another of Saban's standout qualities. Several of his assistants have gone on to fill high-profile head-coaching jobs. That list includes Georgia's Kirby Smart, Ole Miss' Lane Kiffin, Texas' Steve Sarkisian, Miami's Mario Cristobal, Florida's Billy Napier, Maryland's Mike Locksley, New York Giants head coach Brian Daboll and plenty of other former head coaches including Jimbo Fisher (Texas A&M and Florida State) and Mark Dantonio (Michigan State).

RECRUITING AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT ///

Although Saban understood X's and O's, no piece was more important than talent acquisition and development. Alabama consistently reeled in some of college football's best recruiting classes and developed that talent into high picks in the NFL Draft. Overall, Saban had 52 players (47 with the Crimson Tide) drafted in the first round, including three this year — JC Latham, Dallas Turner and Terrion Arnold.

SCHEMATIC IMPACT /// As one of the game's top defensive minds, Saban's impact on the field was felt all over the world of college football and in the NFL. Football writer Chris B. Brown summed up Saban's impact on the defensive side in a thread on X, writing: "He wasn't afraid to change techniques or discard old wisdoms; he famously was not a big proponent of traditional backpedaling (calling it the most 'overrated' thing about playing in the secondary). Heck, almost every coach now (finally) understands how Saban teaches DBs whether to turn for the ball depending on if they are 'in-phase' or 'out-of-phase,' something fans still struggle with mightily.

"His influence — which is evidenced by his longevity — can't be undersold."

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